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Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

IDENTITY AND PLEASURE

The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture

ARIEL HERYANTO

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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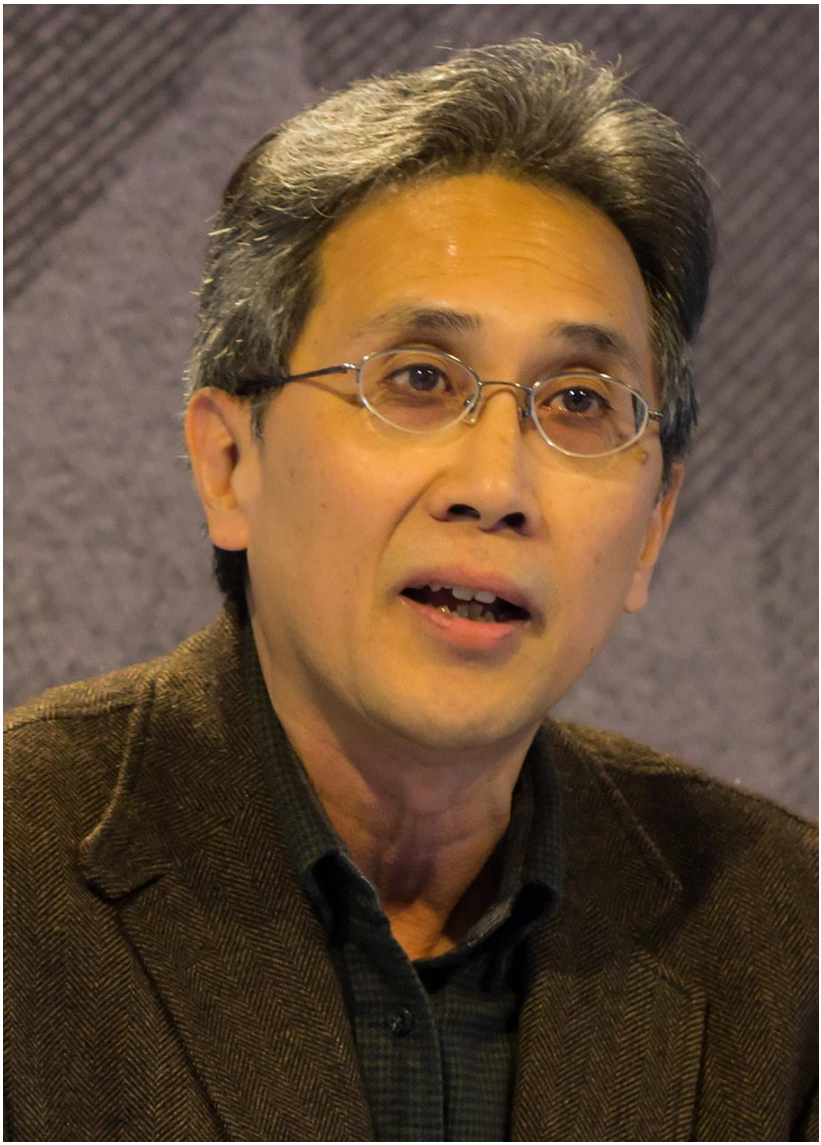

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The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture

Ariel Heryanto

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As in many parts of Asia, in Indonesia many people (including foreign visitors and residents there) enjoy easy, quick and affordable access to old and especially newest international films in pirated DVD version, for less than USD 1 a title. C1

Islamic Fashion Festival IX (29–30 June 2010) at the 5-star Dharmawangsa Jakarta Hotel, attended by approximately 500 people. C2

A model displaying one work by prominent designer Merry Pramono during the Islamic Fashion Festival IX (30 June 2010). C2

The iconic scene from the documentary film *The Act of Killing* (Denmark 2012) directed by Joshua Oppenheimer (*see* Chapter 5). C3

Anwar Congo, one of the leading characters in *The Act of Killing*, took an active role not only in acting but also in planning and producing the film, or a "ruse" (as the director calls it) within *The Act of Killing*. C3

Sang Penari (The Dancer) (2011, Isfansyah) won four awards at the 2011 Indonesian Film Festival, for Best Film, Best Director, Best Leading Actress, and Best Supporting Actress (*see* Chapter 4). C4

Cover dance by K-pop fans has been a widespread practice among urban youth in Indonesia, as in many parts of Southeast Asia. C4

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Muslim women make up a large proportion of the Indonesia-based fans of K-pop (*see* Chapter 7). C5

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I grew up at a time and in a social environment where the expression "thank you" was not supposed to be uttered to one's closest associates and members of one's own family, unless one was angry and said it ironically. The Indonesian phrase *terima kasih* was used mainly or

only to God in prayers, to a crowd in ceremony speeches, to complete strangers, or between characters in fiction. To the more intimate associates, one needed to express one's gratitude through body language. Articulating one's gratitude verbally would risk devaluing the favor or service one received from others. However, having been away from my place of birth for many years, and now operating in a completely different language and mode of communication, I can only express with clumsiness my boundless love and gratitude for the immeasurable material, moral and emotional support from my wife Yanti, and our two children Arya and Nina who followed me to Australia, as well as my mother and brothers in Indonesia throughout the entire period of this research project. In particular I am thoroughly grateful to my better half for her heavenly patience and unfailing support during the best, the more intense, or the most difficult moments of my writing work.

CHAPTER 1

Remembering the Future

This book investigates how segments of Indonesia's population, particularly the urban middle-class youth, attempted to redefine their identities in the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was a volatile period, full of promises of liberation but also apprehension; it was also marked by an unprecedented rise in the public profile of Islamic politics, public debates on past human rights violation, protracted and irrevocable divisions within the top political elite, the rise of Asia's economic power, and a digital communication revolution passionately welcomed by young people all around the world. Symptomatic of societies affected by the huge power vacuum that immediately follows the end of a repressive regime after an extended reign, Indonesia in the early decades of the century enjoyed a brief period of euphoric optimism, which was soon marred by disillusionment, disorientation and despair. It is against such a background that the search for innovation and experimentation with alternatives has begun, and new hopes have blossomed in earnest, occasioned by a nostalgia for an imagined past glory and uncertainty for the future.

With the unprecedented expansion of both the domestically based media industry, and the globally networked social media, much of the ideological battle for hegemonic position to fill the power vacuum has taken place on prominent popular culture platforms, in various forms, designed to target mid-career professionals and the growing number of increasingly urbanized young people. These groups are only a small fraction of the nation's population of more than 220 million, and they do not represent the aspirations of the majority. However, they are growing in size and are disproportionately vocal in the public sphere. As expected, they either attract political and economic elites as potential allies or as a challenge. Either way, it is easier for those in power to reach out to

urbanized young people and mid-career professionals than any other social group in what are extremely diverse ethnic communities residing across the thousands of islands in the archipelagic nation-state. Despite their internal heterogeneity, and in comparison to older generations or more disadvantaged segments of the population, Indonesia's urbanized young people and mid-career professionals share a significant degree of commonality with each other, as well as with their counterparts across the globe; they have similar education levels, economic power, cultural tastes, consumer patterns, and interests in national and world affairs.

Using a richly nuanced analysis of their participation and representation in screen culture (cinema, television, the internet and social media), and taking into account their layered political and historical contexts, this study carefully examines the aspirations of this demographic after the collapse of the militarist dictatorship of the New Order (1966–98). While the book's focus remains on contemporary cultural politics in Indonesia, each chapter also provides substantial consideration of the previous century from a broader historical perspective. Similarly, while the overarching aim of this book is an in-depth analysis of identity and political contestation within the nation, each chapter features transnational engagements and global dimensions as consistently significant parts of the narrative. A central message running through all chapters is that Indonesia has been blessed not only by the rich diversity of its peoples and cultures, but also by a long history of creative ideas. These ideas are the result of a competitive mix of visions generated from a cosmopolitan-minded people pursuing a local version of hybrid modernity. Unfortunately, from the middle of the past century, much of this extraordinary cultural wealth has been erased in the official history and public memory. Surviving remnants of this diversity and cosmopolitanism have become the target of assaults by competing groups of modernists, who wish to impose on the population a narrow definition of what it means to be Indonesian. Fortunately, there is always hope for the future, as the assaults against Indonesia's rich history and diversity have never been exhaustive or totally successful.

This chapter covers three sections. Firstly, I will provide some background information that will be critical to the ensuing chapters. This includes a brief and necessarily simple outline of the nation's political and cultural history. Secondly, I will offer a broad survey of the mediascape in Indonesia, particularly on the island of Java, at the turn of the century, the period with which this book is most concerned. Finally, I

will provide a few words about key concepts and methods adopted in this study, as well as a rationale for the scope of the study and several disclaimers about the limitations of the research.

Back To The Future

In several important ways, post-1998 Indonesia is reminiscent of the country in the first decade of its independence (self-proclaimed in 1945, and internationally recognized in 1949). In both periods, Indonesia tried to rebuild itself as a respectable, modern, sovereign nation-state, following the demise of a long-running repressive government. Both periods saw the flourishing of new hopes, but also the opening up of protracted social wounds, along with falling out of institutional debris that comes with any violent shift in power. In both periods, the project proved to be much more difficult than its proponents and supporters had initially anticipated. There was an unleashing of massive energy and emotion, mostly disorganized, which suddenly burst into the open after an extended period of heavy-handed order and fear imposed with the deceptive appearance of acquiescence. Much of this energy went into high-spirited experimentation with anarchically democratic aspirations; this came along with the unrealistic hopes that typically accompany the rebuilding of a newly liberated nation.

Before long, these efforts had to confront some ugly realities, partly due to the massive destruction of the foundations required for the building of such an ideal society, and partly due to the trauma resulting from the violent conflict that brought the previous regime to its knees. Another more fundamental source of difficulty in both periods was the diversity and seeming incompatibility of the major social forces that constituted Indonesia. Centrifugal tendencies that were suppressed for a long time under a repressive regime came to the fore, and the level of disagreements that surfaced as a result took people by surprise. Previously, many social groups forged alliances of convenience to challenge the older regime as a common enemy. Similar to the post-Arab Spring situation in the 2010s, Indonesians in both periods came to realize that, as soon as the enemy was gone, they needed to confront the more difficult challenge of maintaining unity in the population in order to move forward and enjoy the fruits of their victory. The parallel between contemporary Indonesia and its post-Independence past is worth emphasizing for three reasons: to comprehend the present condition with due historical

perspective, to recognize the problems with the hyper-nationalist ideology that has taken a hold on the public imagination, and to address the issue of Indonesia's public amnesia of its complex history. Let me elaborate on each of these points in consideration of their critical value to the subsequent chapters.

First, a broader historical perspective helps us avoid the general tendency in many discussions (academic and non-academic alike) to overstate the consequences of and significance of the downfall of the New Order government. Many of these analyses and comments exaggerate the novelty of things that came after 1998, taking the fall of the New Order as a point of departure for many events and phenomena that have taken place since—whether welcome, regretted, or a combination of both with varying degrees of each. Such a common tendency overlooks the fact that many of the changes often designated as 'post-1998' actually began several years prior to the formal demise of the New Order. Examples abound, and run contrary to the assumptions of so many observers, including the discontinuance of what had previously been mandatory screenings of the state propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September/PKI* on private television networks (*see* Chapter 4), the redisplay of the Chinese dragon dance during Chinese New Year celebrations (*see* Chapter 6), and the transformation of Muslim women's clothing from being an act of dissent to a fashion statement among wealthy Indonesians (*see* Chapter 2). Some of these practices certainly bore some novelty, or increased in intensity since 1998; for instance, the expansion of the media industry and distribution platforms for new media, and a decline in the legitimacy of military rule and privilege. However, many other things have continued unabated from the period of the New Order rule, including the circle of political elites who continue to dominate the central government, and the prevailing anti-Communist rhetoric. In select areas of public life, the fall of the New Order rule appears as a return to Indonesia of the 1950s. Unfortunately, such a parallel has eluded many in studies of contemporary Indonesia.[1]

Second, a comparison with the past is important because of the hyper-nationalist sentiment that continues to prevail in contemporary

[1] One important exception to the general tendency in question is a small cluster of seminars hosted by the Herb Feith Foundation, based in Melbourne, Australia. Feith's major work is on Indonesian politics in the 1950s. By default, seminars and public lectures held in the 2000s in his honor are compelled to consider seriously the comparative dimensions of the two periods, half a century apart.

Indonesia. Certainly, it is no less intense than the general mood of euphoria that accompanied the new nation when it declared independence half a century earlier. Such sentiment finds expression not just in public ceremonies of officialdom, or top-down state propaganda, but is also manifest casually in everyday life—of special interest to this book—right down to the private moments of leisure and entertainment. During the New Order regime, the government modified such sentiments by purging it of its populist elements, valorizing and infusing it with the fascist signifiers of a militarist regime: uniforms, ceremonies, combative masculinity, and xenophobia. However, the dispensing of a romantic nationalism went well beyond the controlled sponsorship of any government. A few examples below will illustrate this point.

Until near the end of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, most Indonesians had little choice but to succumb to the militarist government propaganda that portrayed the military-based occupation (1975–99) as a case of East Timor's voluntary integration into Indonesia. Military repression of the East Timorese pro-independence movement was barely reported in the national media. In the few cases when such reports were made, the incidents were described by a tightly controlled media and were largely accepted by the public as attempts by the security forces to restore law and order following violent unrest instigated by separatist groups. Leaked news about the deaths of unarmed civilians and the burning of their houses might have caused some quiet concern among a few politically sensitive individuals in Indonesia, but none of these incidents provoked a public outcry. What provoked nationwide public protest was news about the burning of the Indonesian flag during mass protests against the Indonesian government at selected Consul Generals and the Embassy of Indonesia in Australian cities. At the time of writing, raising the Morning Star Free Papuan flag was considered a serious crime by many Indonesians, and recently such nonviolent acts received severe retaliation from the law enforcers. Likewise, Indonesians took to the streets to protest against Malaysia's use of the song "Rasa Sayange" in a tourist promotion campaign in October 2007, provoking a debate over national heritage ownership.

From the middle of the past century, nationalism and didacticism have remained strong in Indonesian films (*see* Heider 1991). This has developed in tandem with the nation's offscreen struggle to consolidate its newly gained independence, whilst mitigating against endless threats of national disintegration and asserting a national stance in response to the continued hegemony of Western-styled modernity, particularly through

its entertainment industry. After an intervening decade of pragmatism in the film industry, which focused on soft-pornographic themes, violence and thrillers in the 1990s, a heavy dose of nationalist sentiment returned from the 2000s. This appealed to both the tightly controlled government bodies (Board of Censors, state departments and the Indonesian Film Festival) as well as the domestic market.

One of the most commercially successful films in Indonesia is *Laskar Pelangi* (2008, Riza); 4.6 million Indonesians are reported to have watched it. Based on a best-selling semi-autobiographical novel, the film and its sequel, *Sang Pemimpi* (2009, Riza), are about a group of young Indonesians from humble backgrounds who achieve their goal of being admitted to higher education due to their own hard work and the dedication of their parents and teachers. Such films guarantee that the public feels good about identifying as Indonesians, even if they come from modest family backgrounds. Previously, the same director (Riri Riza) and his producer (Mira Lesmana) produced the semi-historical film *Gie* (2004, Riza), about a moral puritan and hyper-nationalist activist who died young. *Merah-Putih* (*Red and White*), which is shorthand for the national flag, is the title of a trilogy *Merah Putih I* (2009, Sugandi), *Darah Garuda-Merah Putih II* (2010, Allyn and Sugandi), and *Hati Merdeka-Merah Putih III* (2011, Allyn and Sugandi). Garuda, a large mythical bird that appears on the national coat of arms and state ideology icon, was adopted for another film titled *Garuda di Dadaku* (*Garuda on my Chest*) (2009, Isfansyah), and its sequel *Garuda di Dadaku 2* (2011, Soedjarwo). In the same decade, producer Nia Sihasale and director Ari Sihasale made a series of strongly nationalist and 'feel-good' movies, including *King* (2009, Sihasale), the name of one of several world badminton champions from Indonesia. The national anthem is played at length in the concluding scene. When Indonesian students at an Australian university organized a screening of the film on campus, half the audience comprising mainly Indonesians, spontaneously stood up from their seats upon hearing the national anthem and sang it solemnly until the end of the show![2]

[2] One film reviewer made an extremely rare comment about how the national flag has been used in many Indonesian films as a panacea to solve many kinds of problems confronting the characters (Pasaribu 2013). In addition to the film under review *Hasduk Berpola* (2013, Nizam), the reviewer also criticizes *5 cm* (2012, Mantovani) for the same reasons.

Third, some historical perspective is necessary, because Indonesians have suffered from serious historical amnesia for many decades and not many foreign analysts have helped remedy this problem. This may appear to contradict my points in the preceding paragraph. However, despite the general glorification of the nation and romanticizing of its past, the much-celebrated history of the successful nationalist struggle for independence, as well as the widely accepted narrative of Indonesia's plight under Dutch colonialism, are highly problematic. Bereft of its complex and undesirable aspects, the nation's past in official historiography as well as in literary writings and films, is a caricatured story consisting of a few great heroes (mainly the military and paramilitary leaders) and their defeated villains (mainly the Dutch colonizers or fellow nationals of left-leaning ideological orientation, including followers of Sukarno (the first president) and members of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) or their sympathizers). During much of the New Order rule, those who challenged the official history risked severe penalties. Such perspectives remain largely intact, outliving the dismantling of the New Order regime. As a result, many Indonesians born and raised in the past two generations have been deprived of a basic and balanced education of their own national history.

The consequence is not simply a series of blanks spaces in the official narrative of the nation, but more seriously, the widespread inability to have an adequate historical perspective in discussions about many contemporary issues. For example, the recent controversies preceding the ratification of the anti-pornography laws in 2008, or the violent attacks against non-mainstream Islamic sects and other minorities religions in the same decade, have largely dwelled on details of the series of conflicts, formal legal codes, or its moral, theological, and philosophical underpinnings. What has been lost in most of the public debates is the question of its historical timing: why have such conflicts of this scale only recently escalated to the level they did, since the last few years of the New Order? Certainly, it can be related to Indonesia's Islamization. The next question, then, is why only now? The majority of people living in this archipelago have professed Islam for centuries. Why did the political aspirations of this majority fail to assume a dominant power position earlier? In Chapters 2 and 4, I suggest some partial answers to this question.

Hyper-nationalism and historical amnesia are not necessarily contradictory. An almost unconditional love for the nation is built on a combination of particular knowledges and select ignorance, overlooking and

forgetting the unsettling parts of that history. In this regard, Indonesia is not unique. Not only is love blind, but as Earnest Renan observed more than a hundred years ago: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation" (1990: 11). A comparison of Indonesia in the 1950s and in the 2000s must also make note of the important differences. Unlike the post-independence situation, the return of a remarkably fluid situation in contemporary Indonesia proceeded at a moment of high media saturation, caused by the rapid and broad dissemination of digital new media technologies. A majority of those in power in Indonesia today and those studying its history belong to "the last generation of human beings who will remember life before the Internet, though only just" (Grossman 2010: np).

In the middle of the past century, only a small number of persons of letters took part in the series of sustained and high profile debates about how the newly independent nation-state should be managed, the direction it should take in the future, and most importantly, what being Indonesian might or should mean. In striking contrast, in the first decade of this century, social media technology has democratized almost all of the public debates to an unprecedented extent. This is not to say that all is well, unless one is naïve enough to believe democracy is always and necessarily a good thing for all.[3] The media democratization has taken on expanded significance since the fall of the New Order, alongside the state's limited interest and capacity to regulate and control freedom of speech.

Severely divided, factions within the political elite did not have much choice except to negotiate alliances or compete with each other in wooing public support to survive politically. However, the public has also been seriously divided, with some of the stronger factions pursuing exclusionary and conservative political agendas, which alarmed the more pluralist-minded segments of the population. Most of the time, those who run the government are neither compelled by nor interested in the views or aspirations emerging from the noisy debates among fragmented citizens in multiple sites in the public domain. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the political elite can afford to completely ignore the

[3] For a modest attempt to critically examine the concept and practice of 'democracy', *see* Heryanto (2009), and also Chapter 8 of this book.

power of the new media or popular culture that has been injected with an unprecedented degree of flexibility, convertibility and interactivity.

New Media Environment

Recent changes to the mediascape in Indonesia are neither unique to nor isolated from what is happening around the rest of the globe. By the second decade of this century, it has become glaringly evident how new media has intervened and reshaped our social lives across the globe at many levels. It may be as banal as individuals posting a photo of themself on Facebook with an old friend they met by coincidence in a café, making it instantaneously available worldwide. This technological change has also manifested more seriously, as in the case of the major leaking by whistleblowers, or cyber-attacks on state intelligence and defence at the highest level, as demonstrated by the remarkable Wikileaks incident. Although Marshall McLuhan's (1964) vision of a 'global village' remains a naive utopia for some, his basic perspective remains instructive and is worth revisiting. From a McLuhanist perspective, one can make the substantial argument that the regime of print and literacy, which gave birth to new imaginings, revolutions and social institutions (banking, science, militarism and nations), has reached its peak. The print regime now takes a defensive stance in facing the revolutionary challenges of a new era, about which we only begin to know so little (*see* Chapter 8).

Ours is a world that alters

> [t]he ways in which identity has traditionally been constructed; social class, the nuclear family, trade unionism, sense of community, and/or geographical place have all become increasingly fluid and lost much of their primacy in defining 'us' as members of specific social groups.
>
> (Rayner 2006: 346–7)

That is especially true for young people, for whom "the chat rooms and virtual communities that they inhabit are more relevant, more defining for them as individuals, than the television or mainstream pop music that they may also, to a lesser extent, still consume" (Rayner 2006: 346). Media technologies and their formats have become increasingly integrated; instead of operating in isolation or competition as they used to, their content is now easily convertible from one medium to another for millions of people.

In 2010, *Time* magazine selected Mark Zuckerberg as Person of The Year,[4] although another candidate, Wikileaks cofounder Julian Assange, gained a larger number of popular votes from readers days before the final selection. "In less than seven years, Zuckerberg wired together a twelfth of humanity into a single network … almost twice as large as the US. If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest, behind only China and India" (Grossman 2010: np). By then (2010), Indonesia was home to the world's fourth largest number of Facebook users, rising up from rank seven the previous year in 2009. Two years earlier (2007), Indonesia was nowhere in the ranking recorded by Nick Burcher in his blog. Within one year (2011), it jumped to the world's second position (Burcher 2012).

Ten years since the collapse of the New Order, the number of licensed print media in Indonesia has more than doubled, from 289 to more than 1,000. The number of commercial television networks has increased from five to more than ten in the same period. Local television networks did not exist when the New Order collapsed, but a decade later, around 150 of them were operating across the nation. At the time this book was in preparation in mid-2013, the number had increased to 415 (*Tempo* 2013: 87). The mass media has been one of the most powerful institutions in the country, and was the only industry that expanded its job market in the wake of the 1998 crisis (Heryanto and Adi 2002). Some media businesses even doubled their revenue during this period (Hill 2007: 10) when millions of others were contracting. For the first time in Indonesian history "[o]ver 90% of Indonesians (over 10 years old) account watching television as one of their main social and cultural activities" (Lim 2011: 1); that amounts to more than 220 million people, 15 per cent of which enjoy satellite television network (Lim 2011: 2). Between 60 to 80 per cent of the content on commercial television consists of entertainment such as soap operas, movies, infotainment and reality shows, for which viewers spent the largest portion of their watching time (*see* figures in Lim 2011: 15). No other social institution

[4] At the time of writing, Facebook "added its 550 millionth member. One out of every dozen people on the planet has a Facebook account. They speak 75 languages and collectively lavish more than 700 billion minutes on Facebook every month … Its membership is currently growing at a rate of about 700,000 people a day" (Grossman 2010: np).

in the country arrests public attention in Indonesia on the scale or intensity of the electronic media, in particular television. Nothing attracts the same number of hours of attention on a daily basis—from around 200 million Indonesians—as television programming. This fact alone warrants special investigation, without which any study of contemporary Indonesia would be seriously impaired.

After a decade of relapse, due in part to the public disdain for domestic films over a much longer period,[5] new titles from a new generation of filmmakers broke new ground both aesthetically and commercially, superseding the popularity of top Hollywood titles (van Heeren 2002). One of the earliest domestic blockbusters to lead this revival was *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002, Soedjarwo). *The Guardian* reported that this film "out-grossed two of the most successful Hollywood films ever to be shown in Indonesia, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Titanic*" (Grayling 2002). Although local filmmakers continued to face an uphill battle (due to nearly zero support from the government, moral policing from nationwide well-organized vigilantes, and fierce competition with imported films), their resilience and enthusiasm from one generation to the next have been admirable. According to the latest data available, nearly half (46 per cent) of all the 84 commercial and full-featured films released in 2012 and screened in major movie theaters were directed by first-timers (46 out of 78 directors) in the industry (Indrarto 2013).

Not all things are enforced top-down from a major industry to the rest of the population. From the first decade of the century, young Indonesians across many islands of the archipelago discovered a new preoccupation with making shorts and documentary films with extremely low budget and simple digital devices.[6] When a major television network SCTV decided to tap these new creative works and opened its first annual short-film competition in 2002, it received more than 1,000 submissions, although only roughly 800 were accepted as eligible (van Heeren 2012: 58).

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[5] The crisis in the film industry in the early 1990s was a result of several factors, including severe state censorship, a huge increase in the number of imported films, especially from Hollywood, the emergence of private television networks with broadly appealing entertainment programs, and the distribution of videos, most of which were cheap pirated copies (Sen and Hill 2000: 137–41).

[6] Similar developments took place across Southeast Asia, *see* Ingawanij and McKay (2012) and Baumgärtel (2012).

Given the new window of opportunity to reach out to a huge portion of the population, it is no surprise that popular culture has become a site for ideological battles to achieve a hegemonic position within the nation's power vacuum.[7] Some of the nation's political and economic elite took a utilitarian approach and adopted the forms and content of popular culture to propagate their values or ideologies (*see* Chapter 8), while others with a strong religious basis attempted to contain the growth of popular culture and propose on moral grounds more legal restrictions for doing so (*see* Chapter 2).

Following trends in advanced capitalist economies, there has been a consistent trend towards the concentration of media ownership and control in the hands of a powerful few. However, as a late industrializing country, in Indonesia one witnesses a considerable diversity and contestation among the existing media content compared to most advanced capitalist countries where media ownership is concentrated more sharply. Professional politicians and political institutions now aggressively invest their considerable resources with renewed and greater interest in the political game in the media, whilst media moguls flex their muscles by entering into formal political arenas, as exemplified by Aburizal Bakrie (of ANTV, TVOne, VIVA news, and Chair of Golkar Party), Surya Paloh (MetroTV, Media Indonesia daily, and Chair National Democrat Party), Hary Tanoesoedibjo (RCTI, Global TV, MNCTV, Trijaya FM, National Democrat Party), and Dahlan Iskan (Jawa Pos Group, State Enterprises Minister).

It would be seriously remiss, however, to account for the new politico-mediascape by taking a narrow view consisting only of what happens at the level of the top political elite. The political and economic elite can never fully dictate or control how texts, sounds, and images are disseminated, received, understood and responded to across this remarkably diverse population. With the widespread distribution of new media, none of the elite factions have been able to monopolize the race for fame and prestige in the media that has become more democratic than anyone may have thought possible two or three decades earlier. The pressure of a fiercely competitive marketplace in the media industry trickles

[7] In an informal discussion in 2008, Ishadi SK, then President of TransTV (the second largest television network in the country), told me that he considered the media currently one of the most powerful institutions in Indonesia; his conviction was to the effect that whoever controls the media controls national politics.

down to the routine work of the foot-soldier journalists, compelling them to look for ways to experiment and test the boundaries of acceptable decency in this newly acquired liberty, resulting in some successes and many costly failures.

It would be foolish to succumb to the once commonly accepted hype about the power of new media to impact social or political change, as if they worked independently in favor of the politically progressive groups. However, it is difficult to ignore its power entirely. The Barack Obama Campaign extended its operation into Facebook and recorded the largest number of fans on any Facebook Fan Page in its first year of operation (Burcher 2010), which coincided with the US election period. However, given his popularity offline, his career history, and his strong party base, it is debatable whether his Facebook Fan Page makes any significant difference to his presidency. Obama's top position in the Facebook Fan Page ranking well into his second year of presidency might be attributable to, instead of contributing to, his popularity. The same cannot be said about the rise of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and the role of the mass media, especially television. SBY was never seriously considered a political leader, let alone a presidential candidate, before he formally ran for the elections in 2004. His Democratic Party, in contrast to Obama's, was fledgling when it contested the elections. It was in no way a rival to the other major contestants, and while its achievement in gaining parliamentary seats impressed many, it only won a minority position in the parliamentary election. Soon afterwards, SBY won Indonesia's first direct presidential election. It is hard to explain SBY's sudden rise to power, and his reelection for the second term in 2009, without considering the success of his campaign team in mobilizing the power of the mass media.[8]

SBY's main contender for the presidency, Megawati Sukarnoputri, chaired the party that had a long history dating back to the struggle for Indonesia independence; it had already gained the largest number of parliamentary votes. The major difference between the two presidential hopefuls was, and still is, their communicative skills before the mass media. Megawati disappointed the Indonesian public by evading the

[8] I thank Mark Hobart for sharing his perspective on this point through informal communication. The role of social media in relation to the triumph of Joko Widodo in the 2013 election of Jakarta's governorship has more comparison to Obama, than that of Yudhoyono.

media; when confronted by journalists, she always said little if anything at all. In contrast, SBY not only paid generous attention to the demands of the media, the former military officer even went as far as singing at public functions (including international meetings), publishing three albums of his songs (a third during his presidency), and attending the finals of the Indonesian Idol competition. Careful management of his public image has been his ticket to power. Unfortunately, he was not able to build on and manage the initial capital he captured into something bigger during his presidency. He wasted an overwhelming mandate from his voters. Since SBY entered his second term, public support has suffered a continuous decline. The parliament has been consistently hostile to his government. In trying to play safe and secure his coalition government, he often chose inaction in moments of crisis. Frustrated by his indecisiveness, critics have described him as having nothing to offer the nation but the aura of his public image and his preoccupation with reinventing it in the media. Ironically, riding on his public image was all he had to do to win the 2004 and 2009 elections, and was the same thing that had attracted the majority of Indonesian voters to elect him president twice in succession.

Examples of contemporary blending of new media, politics and entertainment and conflictual relationship among them abound (for cases in contemporary Indonesia, *see* Heryanto 2010; Kartomi 2005; Lindsay 2007) and prevail across many areas of public life. The subsequent chapters, especially Chapter 8, will show the dynamics of such politics in detail. But what do we mean by 'popular culture' and why, until recently, have there not been more studies of its relationships with broader political processes in Indonesia?

Popular Cultures, Identity, and Pleasure

This book examines the politics of identity and pleasure in contemporary Indonesian screen culture, particularly in cinema and television drama. Screen culture in this study is understood as part of a larger social institution and practice that is commonly described as 'popular culture'. In the chapters that follow, my primary concern is the cultural and historical politics of identity making and contestation as they appear in selected titles of screen culture or as they bear upon the dynamics of production, circulation and reception of screen culture.

Any definition of popular cultures is subject to debate (Storey 2006; Strinati 1995). For the purpose of this book, I adopt two major senses

that are conceptually distinct and potentially oppositional, although in many real cases, they are not always neatly separated. First, popular culture is understood here as a host of commercially mass-produced sounds, image and messages (including music, film, fashion, or television) and related signifying practices for the largest possible number of consumers, mainly for entertainment. In brief, it is a top-down profit-driven process of supplying commodities *for the people* as consumers. In the second sense, this book also acknowledges the various forms of non-industrialized, relatively independent, communicative practices that circulate using various means (public events, parades, festivals). It is often, but not always, in opposition to or alternative to the first sense described above; it is popular culture in the second sense: created and distributed *by the people*.

I do not want to overemphasize the distinction between the two senses above, and mark such notional distinctions by assigning different terms to them. Chua (2010: 202–6) uses the term 'pop culture' to mean the first, and 'popular culture' for the second. While they seem to be opposites, in reality, mutual borrowings, incorporations and mutations of particular elements between one category and the other have characterized their relationship throughout history. There are no inherent qualities in a particular cultural product or practice that will determine whether a particular product or practice falls into the category of 'popular culture' or not. What was or is 'popular culture' in one particular historical or social setting can be something else in another period and place. They are always contextually dependent. Despite these volatile qualities and contingencies, what conceptually makes a piece of work or social practice an example of popular culture is its accessibility and immediate appeal to a large number of people. When produced for sale (the first sense), they are relatively affordable, and appeal to a majority of people of all races, places of residence, age, or genders. When shared collectively (the second sense), they are often open widely to averagely intelligent people of any background to enjoy, use, participate, reproduce, or redistribute to others. There is some degree of simplicity, strong familiarity, and user-friendliness in all popular cultures that appeals to a large portion of a given society.

Conceptualized as above, popular culture does not have universalist appeal. The majority of consuming or producing participants in the world of popular culture have been referred to—for want of a better category—as the "middle classes" in urban and industrialized settings. They are "neither members of the philosophical, aesthetic, or political

elites, nor … of the new proletariat or underclasses" (Kahn 2001: 19). Like in a 'democracy', in the world of popular culture, some people are more equal than others. The more elitist-oriented social groups look down on popular culture with contempt and alarm, while many of the most disadvantaged groups feel ambivalent, with some aspiring to upward mobility by subscribing to new trends in popular culture; still others feel intimidated or agitated by the hype of popular culture. For all these reasons, popular culture is fundamentally political in character.

Its close and unashamed association with crude profit-making in the entertainment industry has made it difficult for popular culture to gain a respectable status among elites of otherwise varied political outlooks. The elite's demeaning attitude has led to the use of the pejorative term "mass culture" for popular culture (Macdonald 1998: 22; Strinati 1995: 10), as the term "represents a debased, trivialized, superficial, artificial and standardized culture" (Strinati 1995: 21). In defense of popular culture, Dominic Strinati takes a populist stance and argues:

> [t]he consumption of popular culture by the general population has always been a problem for 'other people', be they intellectuals, political leaders or moral and social reformers. These 'other people' have often held the view that this population should ideally be occupied with something more enlightening or worthwhile than popular culture.
>
> (1995: 41)

This negative view partly explains why studies of popular culture have not developed as early and rigorously as they could have around the globe, and especially in many parts of Asia.[9] With specific reference to Indonesia, elsewhere I have identified three additional reasons why scholarly interest in this field has been so little and so late (Heryanto 2008: 6–7): the late expansion of industrialization in this region, the dominant paradigms of Indonesian studies in the most part of its history, and the masculine bias in the general scholarship.

First, popular culture is a product of an industrialized society and relies on technologies of mass production, distribution and duplication. Indonesian industrialization dates back more than 100 years, and the

[9] Examples of the Indonesian elite's attack on popular culture abounds, for analysis in English *see* Henschkel (1994), Hobart (2006), and Weintraub (2006).

history of popular culture can be traced back to the late nineteenth-century Dutch colonialism (Biran 1976; Cohen 2006, 2009; Sen 2006; Winet 2010). Unfortunately, a great part of that history has been denied or erased in the official history of Indonesia's national culture (*see* Chapter 6). We must also note that a major and sustained industrial expansion in independent Indonesia only took place from the 1980s, following the massacres of the Left and rise of the militarist rule of the New Order government (1966–98), an important partner of the Western bloc during the Cold War (Chapter 4). Although popular culture was a topic of public debate in the 1970s among Indonesia's intelligentsia, it was mainly seen by most as a problem, a kind of undesirable byproduct or excess of modernization, to which the state was supposed to be vigorously committed (Foulcher 1990b). The lack of any serious scholarship on Indonesia's popular culture is in stark comparison to the study of other aspects of modern Indonesia. The situation in Indonesia's neighboring countries is not very different. Even in countries where industrialization began slightly earlier or proceeded more robustly, popular culture is a fairly new phenomenon, and its study has only just begun.

A second factor that has been responsible for the lack of attention to popular culture in the general study of Indonesia has to do with domination of a particular paradigm. On the one hand Indonesia's intellectual framework has been fixed too much and for too long on nation-state building and modernization (Bonura and Sears 2007; Heryanto 2005, 2006c; McVey 1995) or the impediments to them (militarism, human rights abuse, rampant corruption, violent ethno-religious conflicts, and lately Islamist militants). For too long, scholars of Indonesia have been either unwilling or unable to deal with issues that millions of Indonesia's citizens find most important or most enjoyable. On the other hand, there is a long history of essentialist orientalism in the study of Indonesia by foreigners and locals alike, who prefer to discover and comprehend the more exotic aspects of Indonesia, in keeping with the colonial imaginary of the 'authentic' native. For too long, Western-educated scholars have viewed popular culture in Indonesia, and Asia more generally, primarily as a poor and distasteful imitation of Western popular culture.[10] Scholars of Indonesian culture often devote attention to

[10] Compare, for example, the remarkable contrast between Gerke's (2000) and Sen's (1991) perspectives in their separate studies of Indonesians of middle-class background,

so-called 'traditional' or 'ethnic' cultures, the state-sanctioned 'official' version of national culture, or the 'avant-garde' or 'high' culture of the nation's intelligentsia that appeals to an international audience, mainly art critics and scholars in the metropoles.

A third factor is the masculine bias (*see* Pambudy 2003). As is the case globally (for a broader review, *see* O'Connor and Klaus 2000: 379–82), both the material aspects of and the conceptual issues surrounding modernization, state-nation building, the economy, religion, war or corruption are considered primarily as activities about and for men. In both real life and scholarship, the other devalued gender is relegated to the secondary 'private' or 'domestic' sphere, which is also the main sphere of mass-mediated leisure, entertainment, and popular culture. There follows a familiar, if deeply problematic, division between the masculine world news and the feminine soap operas, or between serious news magazines and so-called 'women's magazines'. However, as will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, this old division is increasingly difficult to sustain, thanks to the pervasive dissemination of screen culture on various digital mobile devices. The politics of identity is increasingly inseparable from the mass demand for fun, entertainment and a greater legitimacy for pleasure and for the feminine, which is now being met with mixed and often conflicting reactions since the rise of Islamization.

The chapters in this book are stories of a difficult but exciting struggle among urban middle-class young people and mid-career professionals as they juggle the serious business of negotiating (refining, redefining, reasserting) or transforming old and familiar social identities with a new found liberty, and the pursuit of pleasurable endeavors and realizing their

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their cultural tastes and consumption of popular culture. In the former, the focus is on Indonesians who aspired to modern Western lifestyle but cannot afford it. So, these poor Indonesians devised a strategy of "lifestyling", which is a poor imitation of "real" middle-class lifestyle as found in wealthier Western societies (Gerke 2000: 137). She writes, "only a small portion of the Indonesian new middle class was able to afford a Western or urbanized lifestyle. The overwhelming majority was unable to consume the items defined as appropriate for members of the middle class" (Gerke 2010: 146). In contrast, Sen's (1991) study of Asian cinema launches a post-colonial critique of the failures commonly made by Western but also some Asian scholars to understand why the majority of Indonesian movie goers prefer to see a domestically made film that unashamedly portrays the lifestyle of highly Americanized Indonesian protagonists, instead of the "real" Western blockbuster, or Indonesian films that show an exotic portrayal of traditional Indonesian communities.

personal achievements. Pursuing worldly pleasure and desiring a new and trendy lifestyle with a level of consumerist indulgence is undeniably part of that process. Although important, it is only one part, as the mass media, social media, and popular culture become increasingly accessible and seductive sources of information required to fulfill their aspirations.

'Being modern' in this context has always implied a notion of having both a privileged access and a new skill to enjoy the everyday pleasures of consuming modern commodities, accessing the latest technologies, and living a trendy lifestyle (Gerke 2000; Heryanto 1999b; van Leeuwen 2011). Since the late colonial period, according to Henk S. Nordholt, for the majority of the indigenous native middle classes "modernity was a desirable lifestyle" (2011: 435). He goes on to argue that this desire was both independent from and greater than their interest in a nationalist movement (Nordholt 2011: 438). In contemporary Indonesia, attributes of being modern in everyday life served to distinguish individuals from traditional natives (the modern's Others) and a general perception of being backward in colonial and neocolonial times. They are also markers of distinction that separate the middle class from being repressed citizens under the bygone New Order authoritarian rule, from the less disadvantaged majority in the nation (the urban poor and the rural folks), and from the real or imagined possibility of being members of society subjected to a new set of disciplines under an Islamist-oriented regime in post-New Order.

Since the 1980s the concept of 'pleasure' has been rigorously developed among scholars, resulting in voluminous literature, especially in the study of audience and reception in literary and media studies in the West (Ang 1991, 1996; O'Connor and Klaus 2000; Ott 2004; Kerr, Kücklich and Brereton 2006). These studies are invaluable for identifying the many different kinds of pleasure that people enjoy, from watching television shows to reading popular magazines, by taking into account genre, gender, and class differences. This literature in English, most of which is based on a reality from the other side of the globe, is instructive, but not always readily relevant to my current study. My fieldwork frequently demanded I question and transcend many of the assumptions and frameworks adopted in those readings, particularly in two areas. First, characteristic of many orally oriented societies, engagement with (not only consumption of) screen culture in Indonesia takes on a strongly collective or communal manner, instead of remaining an individual experience in the private sphere, as will be shown in Chapters 7

and 8.[11] I will develop further my understanding of orally-oriented culture in Chapters 4 and 8. Suffice to note here that I cautiously use the term 'orally-oriented societies', instead of 'oral culture', to suggest a relative difference of importance or disposition in everyday life in such societies from the more 'literate-oriented societies'. This cannot be reduced to a simple binarism of oral versus literate in cultures or social orders.

Second, time and time again my fieldwork reminded me that most of my theoretical readings are works by liberally minded authors who conducted studies in highly liberal societies for a like-minded audience. The deep running links between liberalism, privacy and pleasure in modern Europe found its manifestation in multiple forms in everyday life, including the highly visible presence of cubicles (*see* Crook 2007). Although modernity and capitalism have been part of everyday life for more than a century in what is now Indonesia, and sustained expansion of industrial capitalism has escalated since the mid-1980s, Indonesians still have difficulty finding a word for 'private', 'privacy' or 'liberal' in their national or ethnic languages. For many participants in screen culture whom I met during my study, the pursuit and enjoyment of pleasure is never separated from more serious moral and social concerns. Such concerns can result from their own choice or from pressures from others.[12] For a significant number of organizations and people who do not agree with each other on many issues, the pursuit and enjoyment of pleasure is believed to require formal adjudication by state agents or

[11] *See* Dovey and Impey's (2010) instructive analysis of the South African film *African Jim* (1949, Swanson); it emphasizes the film's "aural/oral aspects", which serve as a subversive strategy vis-à-vis the dominant ideology and the cinema establishment of the time, as well as a source of pleasure and pain to the black actors and audience. Chan and Yung (2005) reveal a case of shifting orientations from highly communal participation to a more voluntary, individualistic consumption of commodified leisure and pleasure among the Chinese immigrant communities in Singapore. While their study is important to demonstrate the overlapping and dynamic relationship (instead of a static binarism) between orally oriented and literate dependent patterns of social life, it is highly contentious (as they seem to suggest) that the shift is universally unidirectional from one to another.

[12] There is no need to overdraw this distinction. The difference is a matter of degree, not kind. It will suffice to recognize the significantly different implications for popular culture and its circulation in social environments where liberalism is taken for granted, from that in Indonesia where liberalism—as an outlook and practice—is fiercely contested. It has been welcomed by some, but publicly condemned in official pronouncements by the Council of Islamic Clerics (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI).

religious bodies, instead of remaining a purely private affair for individual consumers as normatively understood in the liberal West. The following chapters examine in detail how people walk on a tightrope, trying to accommodate or reconcile these potentially, but not necessarily, conflicting desires, aspirations, commitments, and censures.

Although the core issues of this study have interested me for two decades, this book is a product of a four-year intensive research project (2009–12), involving library work, regular online participants in various groups operating with social media as well as in offline environments, ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, observations and focus group discussions. Three locally based and very capable research assistants (Evi Eliyanah, Monique Rijkers and Yuli Asmini) have helped me collect abundant material (including audio and video, photos, accessories, memorabilia, and posters), interviews and observations of public events. I am alone responsible for analysis of the data, and for writing this book as one outcome of the project.

We collected data from Jakarta as well as various cities from provinces in East, Central, and West Java. The work of data collection covers a wider scope and many more complex issues than can be accommodated for in this book. Given how few studies have been published on the subject, this current study has deliberately elected to focus on mainstream popular cultural products with the most publicly visible distribution on the island of Java. More than half of the nation's population from all kinds of ethnic, linguistic, religious and economic backgrounds live on this island. It is also where competing politics of identity and pleasure often took center stage at the level of national politics. As of early 2013, 79.63 per cent of all cinema theaters in the country were located on Java; Sumatra has the second largest number that makes only 7.41 per cent of the national total (Indrarto 2013). A diversity of specific cases from areas outside Java are admittedly absent in the current study; in Java alone, the complex configurations of the issues discussed here cannot be adequately included.

This book aims to be neither encyclopedic in its coverage nor comprehensive in its investigation. Operating primarily as an ethnographic study with an emphasis on in depth qualitative data, this project cannot make any claims for representation of the issues under examination, or any generalization of the arguments proposed. Notwithstanding such limitations, it is to be hoped that the book offers an informed contribution to growing scholarship on the study of contemporary Indonesian cultural politics, and the politics of everyday life.

In an attempt to sharpen the focus of the study, I strategically limited its scope by identifying and analyzing two major areas of enquiry. The first area encompasses issues that were most intensely debated in the national public arena and concerns the politics of identity and pleasure. Two themes fall under this first category: a dazzling explosion of popular culture with strongly Islamic content or themes (Chapters 2 and 3); and the popularity of screen culture from northeast Asia, particularly South Korea (Chapter 7). The underside of the politics of identity and pleasure are plight, predicament, and pain. Therefore, in the second major area of enquiry I will consider the cultural politics that have been largely evaded, censured or forgotten in the general public. These include questions of the 1965–66 massacres that have haunted the nation ever since (Chapters 4 and 5); the century long discrimination against the ethnic Chinese (Chapter 6) and the lower classes (Chapter 8). Of course, the chosen list is open to debate. In Chapters 3 and 5, I will say more about some of the basic methodological issues of using fiction such as films for social and cultural analyses. Intended or otherwise, a collectively produced film constitutes a collective statement about the real and invites open-ended discussions about the real within varied social settings where the film is produced, circulated, viewed, and talked about. Needless to say, the real is understood, imagined, or questioned in potentially heterogeneous or conflicting ways by those who participate in such activities.

In attempting to convey its message, every study has a limit and remains silent on other issues. This book is no exception. As a way of concluding this chapter, let me reiterate succinctly what this book is and is not about. This book is not a study of Indonesian films or television. Rather, it is an attempt to investigate some of the most glaring and repressed issues of identity politics in the everyday life of contemporary Indonesia in the wake of the fall of the New Order rule, as embedded and played out in popular screen culture. Consequently, the cinematic value of the films discussed in the subsequent chapters will not be the primary concern in our discussion, and no general survey of the many diverse products of Indonesian film or television programs will be attempted. Only a small number of titles and scholarly studies will be selected, mainly for their degree of relevance to the core issues of the book.[13] Such considerations have resulted in me selecting the most familiar

[13] A translation of Indonesian film titles will be provided when there is some discussion about the significance of these films, and wording of those titles is relevant to the discussion.

titles with the widest possible audience in society at the time, regardless of what critics say about their artistic merits. Due to my limited language proficiency, the work mainly consults with existing works in Indonesian and English. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Indonesian sources cited in this book are mine. Undoubtedly, a study of this kind would have been much richer if I could read relevant materials in other Asian and European languages.

A critique of nationalist politics is one of the aims of the study, and therefore takes the nation as a serious starting point. While a critique of these politics occupy center stage in the book, nowhere are these issues presented as isolated from, or exclusively in conflict with, or in static relation to local, sub-national and transnational forces and histories. From the outset the national has always already been integral to the global. Indonesian nationalists—like their counterparts in most other places—would want us to believe that their nation has existed from time immemorial and is autonomous to the rest of the world. In Indonesia, the adoption of overtly global elements (such as those from Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist traditions) is widely acknowledged (Chapters 2–3). While these have been incorporated into the nation's own heritage, other elements (European colonialism, liberalism and Communism, or Chinese cultures, as well as Japanese or Korean popular cultures) have been staunchly denied such status, and continue to be considered 'foreign' (*see* Chapters 4–7).

There is growing literature that gives due acknowledgment and pays serious attention to the greater diversity within some of the groups under study (for instance the Muslim communities or the ethnic Chinese). However, only a few have probed deeply into the complex and dynamic intersections *amongst* and *across* these different groups, whose members include those with overlapping identities, for example Chinese Muslims and Muslims who embrace K-pop (Chapter 7). There is also a tendency in many of the recent works on identity politics in Indonesia to assume that the contemporary phenomena under investigation are the recent effect of the fall of the New Order authoritarian regime. While it is hard to deny that certain new elements have contemporary manifestations, it would be seriously remiss to overlook the longer historical contexts of the same phenomena in question. For these reasons, attempts will be made in all chapters to move back and forth between the relevant past and the present, as we likewise consider the interlocking dynamics of each issue from the local, regional, national and global perspective.

CHAPTER 2

Post-Islamism: Faith, Fun, and Fortune

Islamization has been the single most visible feature that characterizes the first decade of post-New Order Indonesia, although it has a much longer history with its dramatic public visibility in 1990s, nearly a decade prior to the formal collapse of the New Order government (1966–98). To a significant extent, Islamization has dictated the frame, limit, and substance of the power struggle of post-New Order Indonesia, although the impacts are not even across the various public domains. This chapter focuses on Islamization in popular culture (of which screen culture is a critical part) in the first decade of the century, and asks whether a modified concept of 'post-Islamist piety' that has been used for analysis of political and cultural phenomena in the Middle East, West Asia and South Asia can be useful for the Indonesian situation in question, and if so, how. A broader context of Indonesia's Islamization in the new century will be considered in order to highlight the specificities of the case under study in comparison to similar trends elsewhere.

Observers disagree on the details of the clear rise of Islamization in popular culture, but most have framed that rise in terms of contradictions between religion-based moral pieties and the crude forces of entertainment industry. Some of these observers show some inclination to explain the trend as simply a case of commercialization of Muslim life and commodification of Muslim religious symbols (Henschkel 1994; Hew 2013; Ivvaty 2005; *Kompas* 2008b; Murray 1991; Muzakki 2007; Nazaruddin 2008; Nu'ad 2008; Ramadhan 2003; Suryakusuma 2008; *Tempo* 2007; Widodo 2008). Implicit in such a view is the notion that Islam has been domesticated by global capitalism and made an object of consumerist indulgence. An opposing view reads the same phenomena as a sign of the aggressive triumph of Islamization in the secular world, including the entertainment industry, which has been dominated globally

by the American model. This chapter aims to contribute to the growing interest in an alternative interpretation that attends to the more complex, nuanced and ambivalent aspects of the phenomenon that have been acknowledged in previous studies (*see* Fealy and White 2008; Jones 2007; Lukens-Bull 2007; Nilan 2006; Smith-Hefner 2007).

I will also put forward a new framework for analysis and debate. My discomfort with the familiar and overly simple 'Islamization versus commercialization' dichotomy lies in the fact that the terms of the debate seem to have evolved out of the grand terms of this imagined split rather than out of the arguments based on specific details of empirical facts and observations. Instead of slotting the issues into one or the other old familiar categories such as 'commodification/commercialization' versus 'Islamization', I propose the necessity of viewing the debate as part of the dialectics between how religious piety has found manifestations in the specific history of Indonesia's industrial capitalism, and how capitalist logic responds to the growing market for Islamic revitalization and lifestyle. In the process of that encounter, both Islam and the capitalist industry have been altered, sometimes more significantly than other times. In some cases, they even substantively converge, if in a less than totalizing fashion. As Daromir Rudnyckyj (2009) shows in his study, the recent movement for greater Islamic piety, far from being uniformly a kind of hedonistic consumerism with a religious façade, can be taken as a new commitment to hard work, self-discipline, productivity in the workplace, and cosmopolitan respect for others on the globe. In this chapter and the next, against the backdrop of the debate briefly outlined above, I wish to consider why and how a modified version of Asef Bayat's concept of 'post-Islamist' politics can be adopted as an alternative framework for analysis of popular culture in contemporary Indonesia. Instead of putting all the issues into the big basket of 'Islamization versus commercialization', a stand that assumes the two forces in the equation are fundamentally separable, monolithic and ahistorical entities, a post-Islamist theory offers an alternative framework that highlights the profound frictions that exist within the Islamic pious communities, and their historically specific transformations.

Islamization

The term *Islamization* needs to be unpacked; it refers to something that is a great deal more diverse and complex than the advancement of

Islamist politics as has been suggested in many discussions of contemporary Indonesia. My use of the term does not imply a straight and easily-defined process of social change, advocated and supported by a unified movement among the more pious members of the Muslim communities, towards a greater space for religious observance or expression of their faith in social affairs and a political agenda. Rather, it refers to a complex set of processes with multiple directions, involving a wide variety of competing Muslim groups that do not necessarily agree with each other on many issues, none of whom has full control of the process. To further complicate matters, non-religiously motivated agents and other factors (such as the post-authoritarian politics, the expansion of global capitalism in consumer goods and services, and developments in new media technology) have partaken in the broad processes of Islamization. What all of these processes share is the rapid and persistently expanding scope, visibility and massive celebration of material elements and practices that are widely understood in the immediate Indonesian community to contain Islamic or 'Islamized' values.[1] Needless to say, in reality, each of these multifaceted elements means different things in different specific contexts. Islamization also includes a wide variety of social practices and ideological struggles that are not reducible to matters of religion or religious politics.

While studies on Islamic texts and their political actors and institutions during Indonesia's Islamization abound, those that focus on the complex and multi-dimensional confluence of Islamic politics and the popular culture industry have only recently begun to appear, mostly as collected essays by multiple authors or as journal articles (*see* Fealy 2008; Heryanto 1999b, 2008; Pink 2009; Weintraub 2011). These studies have looked at a variety of forms or specific domains, including women's clothing (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Nisa 2012; Saluz 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007), consumerism (Jones 2010; Lukens-Bull 2007; Schmidt 2012), print media and literature (Brenner 1999, 2011; Hefner 1997;

[1] Alina Kokoschka makes a useful distinction between the 'Islamic' and 'Islamized'. The former refers to things that are formally prescribed by Islam teachings, while the latter includes goods or services that "fit neither into the category of *halal* products (such as correctly slaughtered meat) [or practices] nor what are traditionally called Muslim goods (such as headscarves …) [or acts]" (Kokoschka 2009: 226). Islamization refers to the overwhelming expansion in the scope of commodity goods, services, and other practices in highly visible public spaces that are accepted as 'Islamic'.

Hellwig 2011; Krier 2011; Rani 2012; Widodo 2008), social media (Ali 2011; Nilan 2006), music (Barendregt 2006, 2011; Barendregt and van Zanten 2002; Berg 2011; Frederick 1982; Murray 1991; Sutton 2011; Weintraub 2008, 2010) and television programs (Arps and van Heeren 2006; van Heeren 2012; Imanjaya 2006; Subijanto 2011; van Heeren 2007; Widodo 2002).[2] The next chapter will focus on the contestations of modern Islam both on and off the cinema screen, which will hopefully make some contribution to the growing body of literature in that particular area. But before that, it is necessary to present a bigger picture of the phenomena, so that we do not lose sight of the significance of the issues from the broader political and historical perspective.

During the height of New Order rule in the 1980s, it would have been unthinkable for a commercial feature film to depict a state official, an officer in the military, or a police in uniform accepting a bribe, let alone as the object of comic ridicule.[3] Now it would be highly risky, perhaps even suicidal, to have a scene that shows a Muslim protagonist in a seriously negative light. This is not to say that the pressure to glorify Islam has gone unchallenged but that any kind of deviation from today's standards of political correctness can be seen as an act of provocation or anti-Islam. It has long been the norm for Indonesian commercial feature films to have happy endings. In today's Islamization, that trend finds expression in the success of Muslim characters in resolving the problems that confront them or others. Alternatively, films frequently end with an important character converting to Islam, best attested to in the blockbuster *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*) (2008, Bramantyo); to be certain, characters never leave the faith or embrace another religion. And establishing positive links to Islam are not limited to characters on the screen. Intan Paramaditha has examined the off-screen efforts of people working

[2] By no means are the references given here meant to be anywhere near comprehensive. These are just a few random examples for readers less familiar with this particular area of inquiry.

[3] For various political and economic reasons (*see* Sen 1994), the film industry under the New Order never developed into a vital and respected enterprise. The annual state-sanctioned Indonesian Film Festival went into dormancy for a decade (1993–2003), many years before the collapse of the New Order. It revitalized only in 2004 thanks to a new generation of filmmakers. The first blockbuster since the fall of the New Order, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002, Soedjarwo), is the first commercial feature film that shows a security officer (at an Indonesian airport) accepting petty bribery, allowing non-traveling persons to enter the passengers-only space for romantic reasons.

in the film industry to convert to Islam or otherwise increase their 'Islam-ness' (Paramaditha 2010).

To give some sense of the political correctness of the current time, it is worth mentioning two incidents in the first half of 2012. In January, 30-year-old Alexander Aan, a civil servant from West Sumatra, posted a message on Facebook declaring himself an atheist. For this, he was beaten up by people in his town, disavowed by his office and colleagues, and detained by the police. The court later tried and convicted him of blasphemy, sentencing him to two and a half years in prison and a fine of IDR 100 million (approximately USD 11,000). In June, a new film entitled *Soegija* (2012, Nugraha) was released, telling the story of Indonesia's first 'native' Roman Catholic Archbishop, Albertus Magnus Soegijapranata SJ (1896–1963). A number of people publicly questioned the motive behind the film production, suggesting that it was intended to propagate Christianity in the Muslim-majority nation or to counteract the promotion of Muslim public figures on screen such as *Sang Pencerah* (*The Enlightened*) (2010, Bramantyo), which was based on the life of Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923), who founded Muhamadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Islamic mass organization in 1912. *Soegija*'s producer took the negative reaction seriously, going to great lengths to deny the allegations in promotional materials for the film and emphasizing the nationalist cause that the film represents.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, Islamic political activists made up the largest percentage of political prisoners. Under the rhetoric used by the regime in power, these prisoners were "right extremists", as opposed to "left extremists" (i.e., Communists), the majority of whom had been killed rather than imprisoned (*see* Chapter 4). For many observers it is tempting to equate the situation in Indonesia during the 1980s with that in Turkey, where a US-backed secular and militarist dictatorship ruled a Muslim majority nation and kept Islamist political activists under tight control or behind prison bars. However, despite the superficial similarities between the two countries, the parallels are not long-lasting. The situations arose out of distinct historical contexts, and subsequent developments have been almost diametrically opposed. At least until the mid-2013 uprising, Turkey appeared to many as having strongly inclusive and multicultural politics (Yilmaz 2011); from the mid-1990s Indonesia has rapidly gone in the opposite direction. A dramatic change in Indonesia's public life began in the final years of the New Order government, and escalated after the regime fell.

In the early 1990s, the New Order authoritarian president Suharto adopted a radical change in his political strategy by actively courting Islamic groups of various ideological orientations. Understanding the reasons for the government's radical change in strategy towards Islamic politics and its consequences require discussion in greater detail than this space allows (*see also* Heryanto 2008b: 13–5). It should suffice to note here that Suharto's about-face in the attitude and treatment of political Islam can be seen as his hasty and desperate attempt to rescue his power as the friction within his immediate circle and power base reached a irresolvable point and threatened to terminate his three-decade dictatorship. In the 1970s and 1980s, the regime stigmatized political Islam, and suppressed all forms of political Islamic activism. As soon as Suharto altered his political stance, court dockets were suddenly filled with an unprecedented number of trials of citizens being accused of having made public statements disrespectful of Islam. As if that formal legal prosecution were insufficient, since the early 2000s, various militia groups have come to prominence in public under the banner of Islam, flaunting their liberty to launch violent attacks against minority groups, including minority Muslim sects and groups or individuals supporting liberalism, democracy, human rights or multiculturalism. In the mid-1980s, school girls faced penalties for wearing headscarves in school; two decades later, a number of provinces had introduced sharia law that imposed penalties on school girls if they did not wear headscarves. In 2003 Teater Koma omitted several jokes referring to local Muslims from the original dialogue when re-staging the 1985 play *Opera Kecoa* (*Cockroach Opera*)—one of most successful productions in its history—clearly in an effort to avoid the risk of retaliation from militant Islamic groups.

Given the significant removal of political restrictions that had been imposed during the New Order in the last few years of the past century and the advent of a new generation of filmmakers, it would be interesting to ask what kinds of films have been made to appeal to the widest possible range of Muslim viewers in contemporary Indonesia. One ready example is *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (already mentioned above), whose production has been widely regarded by scholars and the general public alike as a turning point that heralded the arrival of Islamic popular culture in film. It is based on a best-selling novel of the same title by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, whose background and educational experience resemble that of the male protagonist. The story is set in Egypt, with background music and scenes throughout the film that are markedly Middle Eastern and Islamic in nature.

Surely, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is not the beginning of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia since independence. Observers acknowledge the rise of Rhoma Irama as the 'King of Dangdut' in the 1970s (Frederick 1982; Lockhard 1998; Weintraub 2010) as the most significant pioneer of Islamic popular culture. Nonetheless, in the cinema industry, the level of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s popularity is unprecedented, and none of its predecessors or any of its many copycats achieved success even close to it. Often casually and problematically dubbed as the 'first' or 'truly' Islamic film in post-New Order Indonesia, it attracted more than three million domestic viewers in the first few weeks of its release, surpassing any films previously screened in the country, regardless of country of origin, language, or genre, until the end of that year when a newer domestic blockbuster with stronger nationalist and less religious overtones, *Laskar Pelangi* (*Rainbow Warriors*) (2008, Riza), exceeded its sales figures.[4]

The rest of this chapter analyzes and demonstrates that the remarkable success of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, and the controversy that came with it, is a sign of a new time in Indonesian public life. For a sizeable segment of this world's largest Muslim nation, especially the youth, religious piety and modernity are equally appealing and not intrinsically contradictory. For these Muslims, piety and consumption of popular culture are both available as choices rather than options that they must choose between. While in the past people viewed piety and diversion as incompatible, the new generation of Muslims finds ways (though some would consider them superficial) to reconcile what was traditionally considered contradictions to allow themselves to engage with both the religion and popular culture in meaningful and significant ways. As one might expect, such endeavors have produced multiple outcomes. The pursuit of a morally-sound modernity is open-ended and fraught with frictions within the large and diverse Muslim community. More importantly, the debate that emerges from the new trend is as much (if not more) about being modern as it is about being Muslim. Young Muslims seek to participate fully in the modern world, without giving up their faith. They speak of civil rights, equality, transparency and, of course, the more mundane and fun things in everyday life. As a consequence, the process has had an impact that goes beyond the members of the

[4] Unless indicated otherwise, all ticket sales figures in this book were taken from the *Film Indonesia* online service, http://filmindonesia.or.id/, currently the most comprehensive and credible reference source available.

religiously pious communities, Islamic or otherwise. Women groups, the queer community and various liberal-minded youth groups have been deeply affected by Islamization. In response, they have made their views heard but in non-religious terms.

New Time, New Rich

Modernity may challenge or redefine some aspects of religious practices as well as those who have authority within the religious communities, and vice versa. However, they do not necessarily negate each other as has been assumed by many. Asef Bayat reminds us, "[a] major preoccupation of nineteenth century social theorists was to dispel the distinction between the religious and the non-religious. Now, after over a century of modernization, they are trying to differentiate between the religious and the more religious" (2007a: 5). Not only have religions survived in many parts of the modernized world (Turner 2006, 2007), the world has also witnessed remarkable growth in the so-called new religious movements. "Unlike the established religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, which spread … in an ad hoc fashion, the founders of new religious movements … adopted a world focus from the outset" (Smith 2008: 3). Not only can religion and capitalism co-exist and have links, they can even merge to a significant extent for sustained collective activities in some cases (Rudnyckyj 2009).

In bringing modernity and religiosity together, it has become apparent to many Indonesian Muslims that the tensions that confront them are not reducible to the old stereotypes of Western-derived secular modernity versus the religious traditionalism of the Rest. Unfortunately, in the wake of September 11 such stereotypes continue to be shared and recycled by both sides of the divide: the conservative Western governments, their think tanks and mainstream mass media on the one hand, and the conservative Islamists on the other. No less serious and troubling for many Indonesian Muslims are the internal tensions and challenges that emanate from the fact that Islam—like other world religions—has never been completely unified or homogeneous among the diverse communities of its followers. The fact that this tension-filled diversity exists has never commanded the world's attention the way, for example, the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and its protracted aftermath have. That tension has prevailed in Indonesia since the last few years of the New Order regime.

One argument that this chapter will develop is that there are early signs of the formation of a new cluster of modernist Muslims in Indonesia. Tending to be young, urban, middle-class, they aspire to redefine what it means to be Muslim, in contradistinction to the ideal prescribed by either the old established institutions of religious authority or the current political elite. Although this endeavor may develop into something more substantial and durable, this phenomenon in itself is unlikely to become something that will dominate the process of Islamization, at least not in the near future. Instead, these new widespread but largely unorganized Islamic sentiments and dispositions constitute additional variants of Islam that need to be seriously reckoned with in the contest of Islamic politics and morality. The trend clearly departs from the old traditions. In addition, it also presents a strong resistance to the more exclusive trends or those oriented toward violence within the complex dynamics of Islamization. Similar developments have taken place in several other countries with Muslim majorities, and we would be remiss not to adopt the broader perspective offered by these other cases. Such broad comparison helps us in two ways: it saves us from making unproductive assumptions about the uniqueness of the Indonesian case, and helps illuminate the specific features of the Indonesian case. In the next section, we will first look at the general similarities to be found in Muslim-majority countries, and in the following section we will examine the specificities of the Indonesian case that distinguishes it from many other Muslim-majority countries.

Asef Bayat discusses trends in Islamic popular culture—in Iran, Egypt and much of the Middle East in the 2000s—that are parallel to those I observe in contemporary Indonesia. He describes such phenomena as a case of 'post-Islamist piety', invoking his own concept of 'post-Islamism' (1996). Bayat begins his analysis by looking at the rise to stardom of the Egyptian-born televangelist Amr Khalid, who "[i]n 1999 … delivered up to 21 lessons a week in socially prominent households, peaking at 99 during the Ramadan." Khalid delivers his sermons not only in face-to-face meetings, but also through his utilization of "a full range of media … including satellite television channels … the internet with his state of the art website, and audio and videotapes—media which particularly reach the middle and more affluent classes" (Bayat 2002a). Bayat adds, "[t]he tapes of Amr Khalid's sermons were the unparalleled best sellers in Cairo's massive Book Fair in 2002, and have traveled as far as the back-street markets of East Jerusalem, Beirut and the Persian

Gulf cities" (2002a). Khalid is just one of the many throughout the Middle East who have gathered large followings as televangelists, a profession that did not exist prior to the post-Islamist period. A similar trend has swept Indonesia, with AA Gym, Jeffry al-Buchori and Muhammad Arifin Ilham being some of the most popular Islamic televangelists. However, scholars of Indonesia (Hasan 2009: 239–41; Hew 2013; Hoesterey 2007, 2008; Howell 2008; Muzakki 2007) who have analyzed the phenomenon do not usually show strong interest in connections to trends outside Indonesia. While an international dimension is present in many discussions of Indonesia's Islamic politics, the international aspect has not been considered extensively in studies of Indonesian popular culture with Islamic content, with Howell (2008) and Hoesterey (2012) being rare exceptions.[5]

As religiously controversial as it is among Muslims, the rise of this urban middle class in Muslim communities around the world indicates that the growing class division within Muslim communities is a global phenomenon. The rise of Asia's new rich in the late twentieth century has been well documented elsewhere (Chua 2000; Embong 2002; Pinches 1999; Prasetyantoko 1999; Robison and Goodman 1995; Tanter and Young 1990). The oil bonanza and greater access to education have led to the expansion and political consolidation of what, for want of a better term, has been commonly dubbed "the urban middle classes".[6] The "new preachers deliberately target youth and women of the elite classes", bringing "their message to their [i.e., the urban middle class'] doorsteps, to the comfort of their private homes, social clubs and the stylish mosques of their posh neighborhoods" (Bayat 2002a).

Iran in the 1990s and Indonesia in the 2000s have some important similarities and differences that are not readily found in most other Muslim-majority nations. Both Iran and Indonesia experienced the disorienting effects of a major ideological shift from extended immersion in heavy Americanization, which included daily exposure to American lifestyles and popular culture, to demands for adherence to religious puritanism (during the 1980s to the 1990s in Iran and the 1990s to the 2000s in Indonesia). Both countries experienced a major turnaround from a

[5] *See* also Thomas and Lee (2012) for a collection of related studies of popular culture around the world, largely on a country by country basis, not all involving Islam.

[6] Inspired by the work of others, I have discussed elsewhere both the problems and persistent attractions of the term "middle classes" (Heryanto 1993, 1999b, 2003).

fun-loving society to one ruled by "anti-fun-damentalism" (Bayat 2007c: 435). On the other hand, there are many and significant differences between the two countries, not least in the domain of religious authority as it relates to state politics. For example, Indonesia never experienced formal rule by an Islamist government as Iran did. Although evolving from very different historical contexts and forces, a comparative note of post-Islamist expressions in popular culture that have surfaced in these two countries is instructive.

With the decline of the legitimacy of Islamist politics in Iran, a new power struggle has emerged. Iranian youths have once again begun to indulge in fun activities and popular culture, even knowing that they risk receiving severe penalties from the anti-fun social and state agencies that retain some but no longer full control of the situation as they used to.

> With the war over and postwar reconstruction under way during the 1990s, the young began publicly to express their selfhood both individually and collectively. Media reports spoke of boys who were discovered disguised as women walking on the streets in a southern city. Tomboy girls wore male attire to escape the harassment of the morals police. Groups of youngsters were arrested for playing loud music in public, while others danced in the streets next to self-flagellation ceremonies on the highly charged mourning day of Ashura. The market for smuggled audio and video recordings of exiled Iranian singers flourished in the big cities' high streets, and MTV-type music videos found widespread popularity. Across the capital, underground pop and rock bands thrived at covert late-night parties, where teenagers enjoyed both the music and its subculture of tight or baggy pants, vulgar English slang, and tattoos.
>
> Scores of girls, in their quest for individuality and their desire to have boyfriends and freedom from family surveillance, ran away from home—60,000 by 2002—many of them ending up in street communities, in jail, or in shelters.
>
> (Bayat 2007c: 440)

Like many of their secular, non-Muslim counterparts, the new generation of well-educated and well-to-do Muslims around the world wishes to have the freedom and money that allow them to indulge their cultural tastes and maintain self-respect without giving up their faith. However, the new circumstances globally make it difficult to sustain their faith and social relations without some kind of change. At least two significant shifts are worth noting: one has to do with religious authority, and the other the contents of their piety. Let me say a little more about each.

In Indonesia as well as in other Muslim majority societies in the Middle East, whose histories are nonetheless distinct, the new status of Muslim youth has commonly generated novel needs in the political and cultural as well as the religious spheres. On the one hand, these new types of Muslims, mostly youth, are happy to find themselves on par with their middle-class counterparts around the world in terms of education, cultural sophistication, self-respect, and prestige, while still taking special pride in their religious devotion. Depending on the personalities and the specific circumstances of the individuals, that piety may generate a range of responses: a sense of moral superiority in some, dignified and enlightened humility in others, perhaps something that falls between these two extremes, or an attitude that alternates between superiority and humility. What matters is this well-nurtured religious piety allows them to proudly maintain a sense that they are distinct from the other global citizens. On the other hand, their new status serves to distance them from their underprivileged fellow nationals and believers, who they sometimes claim to represent and defend against external threats from real or perceived anti-Islamic forces (infidels, the "West", or heresy). Enjoying the best of both worlds that result from this status is challenging. After all, many of the new rich Muslims publicly display a strong desire for that which glitters in the un-Islamic world of industrial capitalism, both in Asia and the West alike. Thus, they must resolve the tension that arises from the aspiration to enjoy both the comfort and the prestige that modern capitalist consumer culture offers and the moral integrity (at least the public visibility of that attribute) of being a religious person that could justify the newly acquired comfort and prestige. These new needs have grown rapidly, but remained largely unfulfilled until the arrival of the new generation of preachers.

The new preachers are a recent innovation. For centuries, preachers and religious scholars have achieved their status and authority by devoting themselves to years of deep study. In contrast, this new generation of preachers is made up of high-profile religious figures who are not the product of many years of formal religious training. Most have had formal training in areas other than religion. What they bring to the task of preaching are great communication skills, showing great deftness both in public speaking and the use of new media. In the eyes of their mass audiences, these new preachers have the look of rock stars. They display the latest, hippest trends in their speech, clothing, and hairstyles. They satisfy the needs of the new generation, especially of the rich "who have

learnt to take shortcuts in seeking knowledge, or are trained to be docile learners" (Bayat 2002a). Unsurprisingly, while these cool preachers strike a chord with the young, the new rich and those aspiring to be rich, their sudden popularity has been a direct challenge to the traditionally trained religious leaders, whose authority has also come under threat by the recent democratization of the religion (*see* Mardani 2012).

In Indonesia and elsewhere traditional Islamic preachers do what previous generations of preachers have done: speak seriously of the dogma, offer advice based on the Holy Book and sacred scriptures, and emphasize their message of duty and obedience to their audience. In contrast, the new preachers speak animatedly in colloquial language—using simple, catchy phrases, often with humor and self-mockery—to offer short, practical advice on matters that confront their audience in everyday life. Matters pertaining to studies, dating, diet, cosmetics, clothing, entertainment, parent-child relations, personal finances, work and relations with fellow employees in workplace are staple topics. They use the latest communication technology, which the younger generation and the new rich are intimately familiar with. In Iran, according to one survey, the rise of the televangelists' popularity was in line with the way people started to spend their leisure time "over 83 per cent of young people spend their leisure time before TV sets, but only 5 per cent of them watch religious programs; of 58 per cent who read books, less than 6 per cent are interested in religious literature" (Bayat 1996: 50). In contemporary Indonesia, 55 per cent of internet users are between the ages of 15 and 19, and nearly 70 per cent of them use Facebook (*Tempo* 2012a), making Indonesia the world's second largest concentration of the social network (*see* Chapter 1). According to one report in 2012, Indonesia was the world's second largest concentration of Facebook users (Burcher 2012). Issues of religion dominate all forms of social media in today's Indonesia.

A closely related shift can be seen in the dominant contents of the new preaching, which emphasizes individual rights and personal affairs. In the Middle East, "[t]here is a clear shift from the earlier emphasis on Islamist polity to one on personal piety and ethics; from constituencies centered around impoverished middle classes to more fragmented adherents including the privileged groups" (Bayat 2002a). Indonesian film critic Eric Sasono identifies personal orientation as the most important feature in the content of Islamic-theme films in contemporary Indonesia. He notes that Islamic-themed films before the recent trend in the 2000s

invariably presented protagonists who desire to make the world a better place, especially for the disadvantaged, by confronting issues that affect the society at large. In contrast,

> Almost all Islamic-themed films in Post-Suharto era consider personal achievement as a manifestation of piety. This personal achievement in some films means individual economic well-being, while in others it is higher education (which is a means to greater economic well-being). However strong collective bond and friendship to be the character's background, his or her ultimate objective is to obtain higher education or to get rich.
>
> (Sasono 2010: 57)

Admittedly, the above is a rather crude portrayal, focusing on some of the most obvious aspects of what is a highly complex set of practices and situations. Despite the focus on the middle class, aspiration to this trendy new pious lifestyle is not restricted to the privileged and newly rich urbanites. It is also important to note that the new piety is an apolitical force that goes beyond the sphere of hedonistic consumption, which is often disparaged in media coverage and scholarly works.

Islamist Politics, Post-Islamist Culture

Having suggested a number of common features of the popular Islam in Indonesia and the Middle East we now turn to how Indonesia is different from other Muslim countries. In order to do so, we need to return to Bayat's conception of post-Islamism: what it means, how it has come about, and what its potential trajectory into the next one or two decades might be within a given social context. Although Bayat's theory is not readily applicable to Indonesia (and in fairness he does not claim that it would be), I wish to argue, with some modifications and qualifications, that his concepts can be useful for analysis of the Indonesian case, perhaps even in ways that Bayat himself might not have imagined. In keeping with this chapter's narrow focus on popular culture in contemporary Indonesia (as opposed to Islamization more generally) and given the complexity of the topic, only a very rough outline of Bayat's insights in the simplest terms will be attempted, in order to provide a minimal but necessary background for the discussion of the core issues of the chapter.

Popular culture does not figure prominently in Bayat's multiple discussions of 'post-Islamism' that have become widely discussed among

scholars of Islam politics.[7] His account of post-Islamist piety comes out of his research focusing on political changes in the Middle East and other countries that have a significant Muslim population, but his insights on post-Islamism as a whole and his brief comments on Islamic popular culture are useful for the discussion here. By 'post-Islamism', Bayat is referring to something that can be described as both a *condition* and a *project*. The post-Islamist *condition* "refers to a political and social condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters" (Bayat 2002b). In response to that condition the community engages in a post-Islamist *project*, which "is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular" (Bayat 2007a: 19). Instead,

> it represents an endeavor to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty, … emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past. It wants to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity.
>
> (Bayat 2002b)

In order to appreciate the appeal of his ideas, we need to take into account the empirical facts of the cases that served as the basis for his

[7] Bayat's works have had a major impact on contemporary studies of the Middle East and Islamic politics more broadly, especially in Europe, despite some early misunderstanding. Another prominent scholar of 'post-Islamism' in the Middle East is Oliver Roy. Surprisingly, there is little cross-reference in the work of these two authors, despite their common areas of interest and use of the same key concept. I choose to focus on the work of Bayat rather than Roy because Bayat's work is more directly relevant to my current analysis. Bayat's work is more strongly focused on post-Islamism as a theoretical concept rather than a general analysis of the political changes and the democratization processes in the Middle East. Unlike Roy, Bayat extends his post-Islamist perspective into areas of popular culture. Another important factor is Bayat's original work is presented in English, while many of Roy's works are originally in French; they are only accessible to me in translation.

In Indonesia, Bayat's work has drawn attention from some scholars although not very prominently. Before an Indonesian translation of his *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Bayat 2007b) was released in 2011 by the Yogyakarta-based NGO LKiS, a few scholars have cited his work (e.g., Kahar 2011; Pontoh 2011) and a one-day seminar was held at Universitas Indonesia on 14 Nov. 2011 under the theme "Post-Islamism: Democratic Islamism".

thinking, as well as points of qualification that he offers. Bayat's concept of post-Islamism grew out of his observations of Turkey (prior to the mid-2013 uprising) and Iran, where a period of Islamist rule eventually met with discontent, disenchantment, and disillusionment among many followers, even those who had formerly supported Islamist politics. Bayat does not intend for the concept of post-Islamism to imply an end of an "Islamist political agenda," nor is it meant to identify a historical phase in any mechanical or deterministic sense. In fact, Bayat states, "In reality we may witness simultaneous processes of both Islamization and post-Islamization" (2007a: 20). Such simultaneous and conflictual processes are in progress in contemporary Indonesia as in several other Muslim-majority countries.

Post-Islamism is basically an analytical category rather than a descriptive one, and its applicability to specific societies is not without limits.[8] Other scholars have examined in greater detail the complexity of post-Islamist tendencies in the two countries that have become the primary reference points for Bayat, showing that post-Islamism is not always a remedy for the problem of Islamism. In a study of Turkey prior to the 2013 uprising, Ihsan Yilmaz finds a new and more promising movement that goes beyond post-Islamism (2011) while Mojtaba Mahdavi identifies at least three major and competing streams of post-Islamism in today's Iran (2011).

Conceptually, post-Islamism cannot be considered in isolation from Islamism. As we all know, any definition of Islamism is subject to heated debate, which we do not need to review in this limited space (*see* Yilmaz 2011: 247–9 for a brief overview). For the purpose of economy, I adopt a simple formulation of Islamism that has been widely used in Indonesia and is consistent with most scholarly uses of the term: any social movement that advocates and pursues the maximized applications of Islamic teachings (as understood by its proponents) in the widest possible scope of public life, including but not restricted to the formal adoption and enforcement of *sharia* law as the basis of government in a given nation-state. The rise of the movement and its adoption vary depending on the

[8] In a number of recent works on Indonesia's Islam and politics, the term "post-Islamism" has appeared, but only in passing (sometimes in half a sentence), with a very vague meaning and often in a disparaging fashion, for instance Pintak and Setiyono (2011), Rahim (2011), and Tomsa (2012).

context of time and space. The multiple forms of Islamism share a few things in common:

> Islamism emerged as the language of self-assertion to mobilize those largely middle class high achievers who felt marginalized by the dominant economic, political or cultural processes in their societies, those for whom the perceived failure of both capitalist modernity and socialist utopia made the language of morality (religion) a substitute for politics.
>
> (Bayat 2007a: 14)

According to Bayat, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s in many parts of the Middle East, "Islamist movements succeeded for three decades in activating large numbers of the disenchanted population with what [Bayat likes] to call cheap Islamization, that is, by resorting to the language of moral and cultural purity" (2007a: 16). Often the movement combined its religious ideology with strongly nationalist and socialist ideologies against Western domination. However, three decades into the project, many of these movements hit a dead end after continually failing to deliver "a more costly Islamization, that is, establishing an Islamic polity and economy and conducting international relations compatible with the modern national and global citizenry" (Bayat 2007a: 16). As a result, "Islamist rule faced profound crisis wherever it was put into practice (as in Iran, Sudan, or Pakistan); and the violent strategies, and armed struggles, that the radical Islamists had adopted, failed to make major inroads (as in Egypt and Algeria)" (Bayat 2007a: 16). Such crisis offers the conditions that led to the emergence of the new thinking and aspirations he calls "post-Islamism".

Before moving forward with the discussion, it is important to note that no determinism is suggested in the above account. One political development ("condition") does not necessarily follow the other (a particular response or "project"). The rise of an Islamist rule may or may not soon be followed by an internal crisis of its own making, as was exemplified in Iran. Where such a crisis occurs, there is no guarantee that an enthusiastic post-Islamism will automatically emerge.[9] Just as there is

[9] In conceptualizing Islamism and post-Islamism comparatively, there is no suggestion that one or the other is (more) politically or morally progressive. Such value judgment is irrelevant to my current analysis.

more than one kind of Islamist rule, there can be multiple forms of post-Islamist response to that rule. The work of Bayat and other scholars who have built on his arguments have shown the diversity among the many cases of countries with Islamist movements. "In some countries (like Iran and Turkey), post-Islamism has emerged as a popular social movement; in other places (like Saudi Arabia and Egypt), its scope and social influence is limited" (Amin 2010: 242). Husnal Amin's study also finds no significant presence of post-Islamism in Pakistan. Yilmaz (2011) shows how new movements in Turkey may take the next step from being a world's model of post-Islamism to a more secular cosmopolitanism ("beyond post-Islamism"), and the mid-2013 street protests seemed to offer fresh insights into further enquiry of the issue. Yilmaz attributes this development to the successful work of the Fethullah Gülen educational movement over the past four decades, which has spread across continents and found a warm reception in Indonesia.

Being wary of making generalizations and extending his concept of post-Islamism to countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, Bayat (2009) asserts that his analysis is relevant specifically to the Middle East. While I value such caution, it is my contention that his theory can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of the Indonesian case with some modification and qualification. I think a distinction needs to be made between *political* post-Islamism, which pertains to *formal governance* at the state level, the core concern of Bayat's research, and *cultural* post-Islamism, which includes both the high culture of the intellectual elite and the more lowbrow culture that finds expression in the popular entertainments and lifestyle of the everyday, which is the focus of this current study. Of course, as this whole book shows, this distinction does not deny that the political and cultural are inseparable. Although Indonesia has never been under Islamist rule, in several areas of local governance and in selected politically motivated cases at the national level, there is an increased support for Islamist-oriented rhetoric and regulations. However, that process seems unlikely to attain a formal Islamist rule per se. While the situation in Indonesia is far different from that in Pakistan, recent political trends in Indonesia, which have caused major concern, make Pakistan's situation more relevant to the discussion of Indonesia's Islamization and lack of interreligious tolerance (Aiyar 2013; Roger 2011).

Culturally, in the meantime, an Indonesian-style post-Islamism has been growing rapidly, with the popularity of televangelists forming only part of the story. Recognizing specific local differences, I contend that

Bayat's concepts of Islamism and post-Islamism are useful for the analysis of current trends in Indonesia. His concepts throw new light on the nature of many heated debates at the center of national politics, with occasionally bloody incidents, some of which were triggered, commented and represented in contemporary popular culture products. For now, it will suffice to mention the controversies over the adoption of the Anti-Pornography law (2008), and the publication of the Indonesian edition of the magazine *Playboy* (2006) as two well-documented examples of this phenomenon (*see* Allen 2007; Heryanto 2011: 69–70; Kitley 2008; *see* Chapter 2). In both cases conservative segments within the nation reacted angrily to the attempts by their fellow nationals to expand the freedom of the press, as well as cultural and artistic expressions that do not necessarily conform with the standards of Islamic norm and decorum. In both cases, violent clashes in public spaces followed expressions of protest and counter-protest. While it is hard to predict how this conflict will ultimately find a resolution, understanding the nature of the conflict is essential to speculating in broad terms about the contour of a resolution that may effectively either bring the conflict to an end or push it into another phase.

Unlike what Bayat found in the Middle East, post-Islamist piety in Indonesia has not developed out of a crisis resulting from an exhausted Islamist rule. In fact, post-Islamist piety (or something very much like the condition that Bayat describes) has become a major cultural and moral trend across Indonesia even before any Islamist rule has been set up, or Islamist political party has come close to being a dominant force in state power. Our concern is with comparable "conditions" and "projects" or aspirations, not the causal factors, or the precise terminology to label these conditions and aspirations. The equivalent of post-Islamist piety in Indonesia grew out of exhaustion with the exclusions and repressive actions of the secularist New Order authoritarianism. For these reasons, perhaps the term "post-secularist piety" (Khalid 2012) is an attractive substitute for Bayat's "post-Islamist". However, I have some reservations about using the term "post-secularist piety," because as Bayat already indicates, we are talking about people who are "neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular" (2007a: 19). Whatever term is chosen, Indonesia popular religious pietism articulates a morally-based commitment to correcting the modernization that took place under the New Order, but also constitutes a rejection of the notion of a sharia-based Islamist utopia. The Indonesians who adopt pietism have never given their full confidence

to the overtly Islamist political parties in elections, compelling these parties to abandon many of their original dogmas and rhetoric.[10]

To complicate the situation even further, big political parties whose constitutions are non-religiously based have taken up the Islamist rhetoric and used it to boost their political clout. Although Islamism has a long history in Indonesia, its first taste of formal legitimacy through the exercise of state power came only in the 1990s. As mentioned earlier, at that time Suharto, the New Order dictator, made a dramatic about-face and invited a broad range of Islamic leaders from across the political spectrum to share power in a last-ditch effort to rescue his dying regime. Not all Islamic leaders and groups accepted the invitation, with the late Abdurrahman Wahid being one of the most prominent dissenters, objecting to the politicization of faith. By the early 2000s it was clear the ascendancy of Islam, including Islamism, had outlasted Suharto, his New Order government and the interim government under B.J. Habibie. Habibie continued his predecessor's attempts to manipulate Islam for his political ends, including the mass recruitment of newly established Islamist militias.

While people in Iran and Turkey grew weary of Islamism, resulting in post-Islamism, for Indonesian Islamists, the first decade of this century was a jubilant first spring. The small share of the reins of state power with the dominant and non-Islamic-based parties meant they enjoyed a honeymoon period. However, it did not last long as the Islamist parties repeatedly faced losses in election polls, which made them face the reality of the political condition in Indonesia. Key players and analysts of Indonesian politics have underestimated the resilience and political skills of many former Suharto officials, who managed to recoup state power by outmaneuvering, co-opting or marginalizing the more consistently Islamist parties as well as the more progressive elements of the civil society, which had contributed to the fall of the New Order. Many officials from the New Order ruling party (Golkar Party) and its former secular opposition (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle) now dominate

[10] For a comparison of the performance of a strongly Islamic-based political party in Turkey (Justice and Development Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, aka AKP]) and Indonesia (Justice and Prosperity Party [Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, aka PKS]), *see* Hadiz (2011). For a general overview of how the Islamist parties fared in comparison to its domestic rivals, *see* Buehler (2009a).

the national parliament and regional government. Without abundant ideological resources to build their political or moral legitimacy in post-New Order/Islamization era, many members of the current political elite, either individually or collectively, and sometimes without regard to instructions from the formal party, adopted the rhetoric of Islamist politics to advance their own business or political interests. It is these politicians from the New Order, not their counterparts in the Islamist political parties, who have been primarily responsible for the formal adoption of sharia bylaws in several regions outside the special region of Aceh (Buehler 2011).

This tactic was successful because of the alliance between opportunistic regional politicians and organized thugs and militia groups, who had been political orphans since the downfall of their former patron, the New Order regime. In many of these instances, the adoption of the sharia law is symbolic, with no serious and consistent reinforcements on the part of the local government. Such lack of reinforcement has frustrated the more vigilantly Islamist groups and provoked such groups to take the law in their own hands. Some members of the same groups or other Islamist groups have reportedly taken advantage of the situation for protection racket practices. These militia groups often present themselves as faithful Muslims, chanting Islamic yells while physically attacking and extorting their victims or the political enemies of their new political patrons (*see* Buehler 2011; Ryter 2005, 2009; Wilson 2008).

Looking Forward

At least two ironies mark Indonesia's Islamist politics. Firstly, Islamist politics began to rise in Indonesia at a time when they had begun to run into serious crises in several other Muslim-majority countries (e.g., Iran, Turkey and potentially Egypt). Since popular culture, particularly screen culture, is the focus of this book, it is worth noting that Iran's post-Islamist wave has been concurrent with the rise of its films to international prominence and critical acclaim. Secondly, Indonesian Islamism has enjoyed its first period of formal legitimacy in state power largely because of the actions of secular politicians, who themselves demonstrate no credible conviction to any religious cause. In the meantime, the few Islamic parties that had originally aspired to pursue Islamist politics have been politically marginalized after repeatedly failing to win a significant number of votes in elections. Various smaller Islamist groups have survived and continued to pursue an Islamist political agenda. From time

to time the paramilitary sections of these politically insignificant groups make the news because of their violent acts, but none of them have had any major long-term political impact. Yet, in another instance of irony, these are the same parties that have gained the most media attention in the West because of their exclusivist politics; feeding and reproducing the international panic over the perceived threats of the West's religious and violent 'Others'. This is regrettable, as the larger picture of the political and cultural dynamics in many Muslim-majority countries that defy the familiar stereotypes does not receive the attention it deserves.

It is hard to know how the tension between a popular post-Islamist/post-secularist piety and the state-sponsored, ultra-conservative politics of Islamism might find a resolution. We can only speculate in broad terms about the form that such a resolution may not take. Given that the nature of the conflict is fundamentally not an issue of faith but one of politics, fortune and morality, it is likely that non-religious factors will determine how the conflict is resolved. The fact that the political elite is willing to use Islam for short-term political gains also smacks of opportunism and implies that it would be as easy for them to give up the Islamist banner and adopt something else if and when new circumstances demand.

In light of the above, the search for a better understanding of the conflict or a prediction of its possible resolution demands that we go beyond a theology and a close reading of sacred texts or a focused analysis of the formal political institutions and actors among the elite. More serious attention must be directed toward popular culture and how it figures in the daily lives and imaginations of millions of people, especially the youth and women who are underrepresented in politics. In both the Arab Spring in 2011 and in Indonesia since 1998, youth and women played a critical role in challenging the status-quo dominated by conservative Islamist orthodoxy and spearheaded a movement towards a post-Islamization. It is also worth noting that while Bayat welcomes post-Islamism in political domains as a progressive force in the creation of a civil society, he is less sanguine about the impact of post-Islamist piety in popular culture. Because (not in spite) of being conservatively and selfishly middle-class oriented, post-Islamist piety in Indonesia has been an important force that has resisted and dampened the pressures from Islamist militanism with "the propensity to celebrate 'noble death' or sacrifice … the annihilation of self and the 'other' in the name of a 'higher cause'" (Bayat 2007c: 438), be it based on religious faith or otherwise.

Indonesia has a long history of 'street politics' and 'people power', and romanticized tales of the selfless commitment and power of these movements abound (*see* Heryanto 2003). In truth the emergence of these mass revolts has more often been spontaneous, unintentional and contingent on the presence of certain factors (*see* Heryanto 2010a). They are usually a response to a protracted crisis that no single party is in full control of. If Indonesian history is a reliable indication, any major change to the status quo will likely begin with the rise of a new dictatorship resulting from the escalation of conflict in or the complete fracturing of an unhappy coalition. Such a situation invites intervention from either the general population or international forces, or both. Until then, what it means to be a modern Indonesian Muslim remains a central issue over which contemporary political battles are fought in public debates and parliament sessions, with occasional outbursts of physical low-level violence.

In parliament, the mainstream media and on social media networks, as well as in everyday life, the battle for Indonesia's future in a transnationalized world is manifest in the debates over such issues as women's rights, polygamy, the volume of loudspeakers during Ramadhan, and the rightful place of minority groups, including the various sects of Islam, non-Muslims and non-heterosexuals. For example, consider the dynamic shifts and political significance of the debate concerning the proper dress code for Muslim women, especially the issue of veiling. Although that debate has taken place over a relatively short period of time, it is a testimony of the overwhelming expansion of Islamization as well as the competing values that the practice of veiling can acquire.

Suzanne Brenner (1996) was one of the earliest scholars to examine in-depth the novel and politically-charged act of donning a veil in Indonesia. Her analysis was based on an ethnographic study of selected urban, well-educated young Muslim women in the Javanese court city of Solo in the late 1980s. At that time a nation-wide censure of veiling was part of a larger state-sponsored suppression of the Islam-based political movement; wearing a veil in public was an open expression of political dissent. Brenner makes the important observation that, in that context, the act of wearing a veil was an unequivocally modernist attempt to break from both the old tradition of veiling and the existing notion of Western-style modernity (1996: 673–4). Nancy Smith-Hefner's later study (2007) complements Brenner's. Based on her two-decade long ethnographic study in Yogyakarta, another Javanese court city, she reports the marked difference between the views held by young women studying

at secular universities and those held by young women studying at religious universities. While earning stronger credentials in Islam than their sisters from the secular schools, activists from the more traditional religious institutions

> question not only the motivations of those who have recently chosen to veil but also the meaning and necessity of veiling itself … these neotraditionalist activists ask whether the stricter forms of veiling promoted by militant student groups represent an effort to impose "Arab culture" on Indonesian women, who already have their own authentic tradition of veiling and modesty. A few even question whether it is necessary for Muslim women to veil at all.
>
> (Smith-Hefner 2007: 403)

What remains understudied is the rapidly growing industry of Muslim women's clothing, something that had already become notable in the late 1990s (Heryanto 1999b). After centuries of being an ordinary practice in many parts of the Indonesian islands, veiling acquired a novel and politically-charged value as an expression of dissent at the height of the New Order regime in the mid-1980s, before it was also transformed into a fashion trend from the 1990s and a form of political correctness since the turn of the current century. More recently, a new trend had developed: donning a veil has become a strategy among high-profile female defendants when they appear in court. For example, Nunun Nurbati, Neneng Sri Wahyuni and Yulianis, all tried in 2012 on charges of embezzlement of state funds, wore the veil in court, presumably to attract sympathy from the general public following the case in the media, and perhaps from the public prosecutors and judges as well.[11] Interestingly, one of the first high-profile defendants in court to adopt the tactic of veiling was neither a pious Muslim nor Indonesian, but the Australian model Michelle Leslie, a well-known lingerie model. In 2005 she was caught in possession of illegal drugs in Indonesia. The tactic seemed effective. Although the court found her guilty and sentenced her to three months in prison, Leslie was credited with time served and did not need to spend any more time in jail after the sentencing.

In contemporary Indonesia, as elsewhere, no major clashes appear between capitalism and the commitment to religious piety. The two can go hand in hand for various sometimes contradictory reasons. Religion

[11] In an interview with one print media, Marcoes-Natsir (2012) discussed the issue.

can offer relief for the politically and economically disadvantaged who have no representation or recourse to justice. Among the advantaged urban critics of the status-quo, religion can serve as a convenient rallying point of dissent when all legitimate venues of formal politics have been curtailed. For those in power, surrounded by poverty, corruption, and state-sponsored violence, religious piety can help restore their anxiety about their status, ease their guilt, or neutralize the public perception of their greed. Whether or not those efforts result in success is a different matter.

This chapter demonstrates that the meaning of Islamization, like veiling, has been neither stable nor singular, and no one can entirely control its multiple and often contradictory meanings. More than simply illustrating the tensions between the desire for wealth and moral respect during the current Islamization of Indonesia, the production and reception of selected Indonesian films constitute a critical site for the forceful expression of the conflicts, negotiations and attempts to reconcile the conflicting parties and ideologies. The next chapter will be devoted to analyzing that process in detail.

CHAPTER 3

Cinematic Battle

In the previous chapter, I argued that Indonesia's post-Islamist aspirations emerged in a situation that was quite different from its counterparts in the Middle East despite some common features. I also noted that, while Islamism is steadily creeping into Indonesia's formal political institutions, post-Islamism is reflected particularly strongly in popular culture. However, both Islamism and post-Islamism are far from being monolithic or unified. This chapter aims to show in detail some of the diversity and competition among post-Islamists in the specific domain of the cinema. It will bring to the fore the attempts on the part of sizeable segments of the population in Indonesia to accommodate, negotiate and modify both modernity and the dominant form of Islam as advocated by their political elite. In particular, we shall see how urban-based Indonesians try to juggle the three balls of being an observant Muslim who anchors moral sensibilities in Islam, being a respectful and responsible citizen of the sovereign and modern nation-state of Indonesia, and being a member of the global community of producers and consumers.

This chapter consists of three sections. I will begin with a reexamination of the controversy of the popular film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*) (2008, Bramantyo). I will then go on to discuss the films *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (*Woman with a Turban*) (2009, Bramantyo) as a corrective or counter-statement to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (*When Love Has A Tasbih*) (2009, Umam) as a counter-counter statements to both *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. One cannot adequately appreciate the significance or historical novelty of such cinematic battle without considering what preceded *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. In the third section, I will briefly discuss how a retrospective look at the films *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* (*The End of The World is Near*) (2003, Mizwar)

and *Catatan Si Boy* (*Boy's Notes*) (1987, Cheppy) throw new light on what is so historically specific about Indonesia and its Islamization in the early decades of the century. I will also address why *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* has enjoyed success greatly beyond the expectations of its filmmaker.

A great deal has been written on the content and popularity of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. Indeed, it seems impossible to discuss Islamic popular culture without mentioning the film. This chapter will focus more on the broad controversies that the film has generated and analyze responses to the film's popularity both on and off the screen. These controversies will be taken as the starting point for an analysis of the broader issue of the politics of identity and pleasure in the time of Indonesia's Islamization. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* will be examined as one of several competing expressions that convey a certain positioning on the part of urban youth. These young people avow a real commitment to rebuilding a morally sound modern society as a counterbalance to the moral decline they suggest took place in immediate past under the secular and militarist New Order government, and a counterbalance to the calls for adoption of the Islamic sharia law. Pursuit of this utopia has proven to be a daunting task, not least because it runs counter to the Islamist politics that prevailed in significant areas of the government at national and local levels discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter aims to make a modest contribution to the growing literature on Islamic popular culture in Indonesia by focusing on the intersecting contestations of modern Islam on- and off-screen. Neither 'culture' nor 'cinema' will be examined as autonomous entities that are separable from the broader political and economic forces.

Obviously, we should never take commercially-produced films as a medium of factual representation of social reality in a straightforward and empirical sense. Indeed, they are not usually intended to be taken as such. There are more reasons for this than the media's technological inability to represent true social reality. Mirroring social reality in film is unattractive to both the professionals who produce films and the general public who consume them. Successive governments in Indonesia have imposed restrictions on what can be screened publicly, and consumers are usually more interested in going to a movie theatre to escape rather than confront the real world. However, despite all those factors, films can be enormously instructive material for a serious investigation of real social relations in a given society, public consciousness, fantasies or apprehensions.

Intended or otherwise, a commercially-produced feature film constitutes a collective statement about what is considered 'normal' (and for that matter what is 'not normal': the 'odd', 'humorous', 'attractive' or 'scary') within the social setting of a state-regulated territory, and what is approved or tolerated by societal organizations and state-sanctioned bodies. Occasionally, cinematic statements are made with the intention of provoking the public to challenge some given norm or introducing to them a new sense of excitement. However, even in those cases the effort and success of the filmmaker will rely heavily on the public's assumptions about existing norms. Given the profit-driven nature of the industry and the huge investment required to make a film, more often than not commercial feature films are produced to conform to the established or perceived norms that will satisfy the general public's expectations in order to attract an audience. Based on what we know about the norms in contemporary Indonesia, the analysis below closely examines which aspects of society are foregrounded and which are exaggerated, distorted, overlooked or excluded, or presented under erasure (and also how and why). In turn, this exercise requires serious consideration of the larger social contexts in which cinema plays a role, and that is the focus of the next section.

Dazzling Hit Beyond Expectations

The collapse of three solid decades of rule by the centralist New Order regime and the protracted impact of the 1997 economic crisis created a disorienting moment. This post-authoritarian moment created a huge political vacuum, unleashing a process of liberalization. In this context, the release of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* fulfilled a long-standing desire among millions of impressionable young Muslims at the cinema. The film offers an attractive and much needed middle ground between the image of militant Islamists—widely disseminated by Western media and domestic Islamist groups—and the traditionally pious, submissive Muslim from the pre-digital age. More tantalizing to the senses and fantasies of the audience than the novel, which is read in solitude, the film drew 3.7 million movie-goers into theatres where they saw a highly attractive and desirable modern Muslim to emulate. No one knows how many hundreds or thousands more watched the film in legal or illegal versions online, and pirated DVD copies. The film projected the image of an Indonesian from a modest family background who has unquestionable

Islamic piety, moral conscience and intellectual industriousness; he aspires to become both a member of the young middle-class intelligentsia and a post-colonial citizen who is at ease with the world of classical Islamic texts as well as a Western-dominated global lifestyle and consumption.

Nothing in Indonesian cinema has struck a more profound chord with the vast majority of young Muslims who are so familiar with the shopping malls that housed the cinemas where they saw the film. Young people flocked to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* because for the first time on the big screen they were seeing a representation of themselves, or at the very least an image of the selves they imagined or desired themselves to be. Moreover, the presentation of that image was free of blatantly un-Islamic scenes of explicit sex, gruesome violence, bad humor or ghostly power that had become staples in Indonesian film industry. Now for the first time, the cinema respectfully presented a young Indonesian Muslim who was young, hip, mature and pious, an image that was authoritatively legitimized by the powerful institution of the commercial film industry. Something similar occurred when the more secular film *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002, Soedjarwo) was released. In this film, actors portraying Jakarta high school students speak in realistic, trendy, colloquial Indonesian, and make explicit references to abusive parents. Both the speech style and the content would have been censured under the New Order rule. Several Islamic-themed films had previously come and gone before *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* appeared in theaters (to be discussed later in this chapter) but none had the same impact on youth.

No less remarkable than the record number of tickets that *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* sold was the kind of audience that it drew. Eyewitness reports consistently mention that the film's audience included many people who appeared to have never been in a movie theater before. These included elderly and middle-class women who were members of Islamic study groups and people from outside the urban centers, where functional literacy level is low. They showed great discomfort as they passed through the theatre halls and observed the young women also in attendance and the posters for upcoming films that featured images of scantily clad women posing seductively (Sasono 2008a; Yumiyanti 2008), but appeared quite content and satisfied at the end of the screening of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. To understand the gulf that separated the social world of these new audience members from the regular movie goers, it is instructive to note the critical reception that *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* received. Film critics were lukewarm in their assessments of the film's aesthetic achievements, and it

did not do well at the Indonesian Film Festival that year. Perhaps even worse, many Islamists strongly criticized the film for allegedly forsaking Islam in the interest of material gain and fame.

At the other end of the socio-political hierarchy, top politicians raced to outdo each other in showing support for the film in the months leading up to the 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections. Ostensibly, they wanted to try to bolster their credibility as faithful Muslims. On 28 March 2008, in response to the highly publicized attendance of a showing of the film by Vice President Jusuf Kalla (Aprianto 2008), his opponent in the upcoming presidential race, incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono staged a well-crafted, even more public spectacle, arriving at one of the capital city's busiest cinemas with a large entourage of 107 high-ranking politicians, 53 foreign diplomats, artists, and journalists to watch *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. A couple of days later, the largest daily newspaper *Kompas* (2008a) carried a report of the event, entitled "The President shed tears many times". The filmmakers, in turn, took advantage of this unusual reception and incorporated it into their marketing activities. Many members of the Muslim communities, reporters in the media, and politicians saw the film as promoting the idea of Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance. In that, it acted as a counter to the stigma placed on the religion in the wake of anti-Islam film *Fitna* (2008, Pimpernel), which had been released just a few weeks earlier on the internet. President Yudhoyono emphasized this point in his speech after viewing the film. The same point was reiterated by Junus Effendi Habibie, the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands in anticipation of a screening of the film that took place in The Hague on 26 October 2008 (Antara 2008). In mailing-list groups, many viewers expressed sympathy for the film for the same reasons; when others made critical remarks about the film, some members took these statements as anti-Islam.

Ironically, none of the major figures involved in the production of the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* was particularly religious. Their credentials were established in mainstream feature films with no religious content, not through connections with any Islamic institutions or activities, and the big success of the film surprised its makers as much as anyone else (*Jawa Pos* 2008). All of this goes to underscore how poorly the intelligentsia understood the emergence of Indonesia's post-Islamism and what the new generation of educated Muslim youths wanted. Further indication is drawn from the failure of subsequent films attempting to repeat

the success of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. Director Hanung Bramantyo told a reporter that he feared the film would be his last because he was unable to figure out what had captured the huge audience (Emond 2012). Rather than attending the film's premiere, he hid outside the theater, fearing that the audience, especially those who had read the novel the film was based on, would be disappointed.[1] I have argued elsewhere (Heryanto 2011: 72) that one of the keys to the film's success lies in the fact that the storyline is depicted through scenes that are not necessarily Islamic. Elements highly reminiscent of Hollywood and Bollywood movies as well as Indonesian television dramas (locals call them *sinetron*) are all salient touchstones in this regard. For example, Fahri, the male protagonist of the film, could be a character in any mainstream film from Asia or the West. Instead of following the new trend among Indonesian Muslims of wearing Middle Eastern dress, he wears Western-style casual clothing and sports a trendy haircut. He is clean-shaven, and at his wedding, he wears a Western suit and tie. The wedding scenes in the film are strikingly reminiscent of those in Bollywood movies.

A closer examination of the behind-the-scenes process of the film's production shows that the film has been profoundly hybridized rather than particularly Islamic. The film is based on a novel, and in the process, the material shifted from a didactic post-Islamist piety to a more liberal-minded and boldly trendy version of piety discussed in the previous chapter. The novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* was already a bestseller before anyone thought of turning it into a film.[2] Novelist Habiburrahman El

[1] Reading his lengthy diary-like blog closely, specifically the sections dedicated to the production of the film while it was in progress, one senses Bramantyo's apprehension and pessimism about the film's probability of success. That pessimism is a result of the many compromises that he had had to make, primarily due to logistical difficulties and budget constraints, which he describes in detail prior to the film's release. Bramantyo gave another detailed recollection of these difficulties in a radio interview (Bramantyo 2010).

[2] By the end of 2007, three months prior to the release of the film, the novel went to its 30th print run, and it is still selling. From its 12 per cent royalty and several other best-selling novels, publisher Republika claimed to have paid the author around IDR 1.5 thousand millions (approximately USD 100,000) and had been sending a monthly payment of IDR 100 millions (approximately USD 11,100) (Kartanegara 2007), approximately 40 to 50 times higher than the average monthly salary of a new faculty member with a fresh doctoral degree at a local university.

Shirazy, a very pious Muslim, claims to have written the story—based on his observation of life in Egypt when he was a student there—with "a purpose—the propagation of Islam" (Hermawan 2008). The producer of the film was Manoj Punjabi, an Indonesian of Indian descent and an heir to MD Entertainment, the largest supplier of Indonesian television soap operas. For many years, MD Entertainment and its parent company liberally took inspiration from Bollywood-style cinematic elements in churning out local television dramas for millions of Indonesian television viewers. Manoj Punjabi approached director Hanung Bramantyo with the idea of bringing the novel to the big screen. Although Bramantyo is a Muslim himself, he admitted that he had never previously been interested in religious films or novels. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* was no exception.[3] He seems to have spent a long time contemplating making the film but ultimately accepted the challenge. After Bramantyo and Punjabi reached an agreement, they sought ways of reframing the storyline that would not only better fit the medium of film, but also attract a wider audience than the novel. This process led to endless bitter disagreements between the novelist, the producer, and the director. The intense debates continued even after the film had been in theatres and broken records in ticket sales, with more people joining in.[4]

At the core of the debate is how Islamic the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is or should be.[5] The novelist and many of his avid readers were disappointed by what had been omitted or altered in the film adaptation. It is a common situation: consumers of a very popular story from

[3] In his blog, he writes in hindsight, "Reading the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* makes me sick. I can't stand the [lead] character Fahri who is too good to be true. Good-looking, intelligent, pious, and all the beautiful women fall in love with him at the same time. He attracts all the women so easily, without having to do anything. I did not finish reading that book".

[4] Information on the tension behind the production of the film in this and the next paragraph was derived mainly from a series of six diary-like notes by the director posted in his blog http://hanungbramantyo.multiply.com—dated between 29 Nov. 2007, when the production was in progress, and 22 April 2008 after it had proven a great success—plus his responses to some of the nearly 900 comments and enquiries from his fans. Additional information was collected by the author from a conversation with novelist Habiburrahman El Shirazy (Canberra, 7 Mar. 2011), and other published materials as cited below.

[5] Hoesterey and Clark make the distinction and argue "that the popularity of film Islami rests in its ability to articulate not what Islam is, but rather what Islam could be and should be" (2012: 208).

one medium are often disappointed when it is converted into another medium.[6] From the start of the production the director Bramantyo was fully aware of this challenge and tried to handle it with care. In fact the anger from the novelist and his readers was due not so much to editing the material so it would fit into a two-hour film as to the sentiment that the overall effect of the conversion was to make the film less 'Islamic,' even un-Islamic. On the basis of the information available, one can assume that the film's biggest enthusiasts were people who either had not read the novel or had read the novel with little or no attachment to the religious aspects that it propagated.

Indeed, the changes that the filmmakers made go beyond simply accommodating the medium's time constraints. The film adds a substantial sub-plot that is not in the novel, showing the everyday life of the protagonists' polygamous marriage. I have shown elsewhere (Heryanto 2011: 72–3) that this addition conveys an unequivocally critical view of polygamy, which ran counter to the pro-polygamy campaign of the day; in so doing, the film problematizes the 'pro-Islamization' tone of the novel. It is worth recalling that around this period there was a nationwide campaign to allow polygamous marriage for Muslims, part of the Islamization process that was engulfing Indonesia (for details *see* Brenner 2011; Heryanto 2011: 69–70). For some unknown reason, the filmmakers' anti-polygamy message got lost among the pious Muslims already thrilled by the arrival of the first charmingly Islamic film of the decade. This anti-polygamy message in the film has also eluded the attention of its critics from both the Islamist groups as well as among Indonesian women groups, who consider the film degrading to women.

Another point of disagreement among the filmmakers, the novelist and the pious demographic of audience members was with regards to

[6] The novelist is one of the most prominent members of the single most successful network of authors with deep commitment to Islamic piety and proselytizing called Forum Lingkar Pena (Pen Circle Forum) or FLP. Most of their works preach to the converted. The novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is strongly moralizing throughout, conveying an Islamist triumphalist overtone. One character in the novel is a beautiful and intelligent character, a Coptic Christian woman who converts to Islam and marries the male protagonist as a second wife in a polygamous marriage. The novel also includes a subplot about a stereotypical American female journalist who despite an expressed interest in Islam, remains completely insensitive to the local dress code. She too converts to Islam, a plot point that is not reflected in the film.

the casting the film's male protagonist. In an interview I conducted with Shirazy three years after the release of the film, he claimed that the director had broken his promise to consult with him before finalizing the cast. In his blog, Bramantyo gives a different account:

> I discussed casting with Kang Abik. He is very concerned about who will play Fahri, and he is demanding to have a say in the choice of actor. We began the casting search in the pesantrens [traditional Islamic schools], but it was to no avail. There were individuals who were good-looking and intelligent enough to play Fahri, but many saw the film as a secular project and didn't want to participate.
>
> (2007)

According to Bramantyo in the same blog post, even at the early stage of the production,

> a group of people came to the MD office [the film producer], declaring that they were from a certain Islamic organization. They brought along a man with fair complexion and a woman in a veil. They said, "This is the actor who will play the role of Fahri, and she is playing the role of Aisha", pointing to the couple … They added, "We were concerned with Islam teachings. We do not want *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* to go astray from the novel and its Islamic tenets. Kang Abik … is aware our decision".
>
> Of course, we declined.
>
> (2007)

After a five-month search, Bramantyo found a couple that he wanted to play the lead roles, but Shirazy vetoed his choice because the actors were not Muslim. After long and difficult negotiations, the role of the male protagonist went to Fedi Nuril. This decision disappointed many of the novel's fans because in his previous film the actor was shown kissing a woman who was not his wife (neither on screen nor off). The controversy over casting continued even after the film's release. Pious Muslims who were fans of the film expressed disappointment when a tabloid newspaper published images of one of the lead actresses smoking.

The controversy did not end at the casting stage. Many of the novel's fans were highly critical of the portrayal of the male protagonist. In the novel, he personifies the Muslim male ideal. However, in the film he appears indecisive, and even weak when dealing with the female characters. The director is reported to have deliberately taken the semi-holy figure from the novel and turned him into "a normal man who can

have wet dreams, when thinking of Maria [another character]" (Suyono and Septian 2008).

Director Bramantyo needed to navigate to a middle ground as he was under pressure from two opposing groups: the pious Muslim novelist and his loyal fans on one side, and the producers demanding that the film have the broadest possible appeal.[7] For example, Producer Punjabi was unapologetic in admitting to deliberately infusing the film with Hollywood and Bollywood elements (Yumiyanti 2008). Bramantyo was not alone in feeling forced into a compromise by opposing pressures. The novelist Shirazy told me in a conversation about how secular groups criticized him for being excessively "Islamic", while Islamist circles accused him of forsaking Islamic values for fame and fortune. Indeed, one magazine accused him of sowing in his novel the dangerous seed of liberalism, in line with the international conspiracy of Zionism (*Risalah Mujahidin* 2008).

The above demonstrates that a contest was taking place at several fronts: between secular and Islamist aspirations, and between the Islamist and the post-Islamist ideas. More importantly, these contests illustrate the range of positions that existed along the post-Islamism spectrum, with some variants departing further from Islamism than others. In the abstract, the notional 'middle ground' position is deemed desirable for those involved. However, what that means in concrete terms differs significantly between different people. All of the above and much in the next section represent the tensions that mark the contemporary Muslim world. They demonstrate how utterly misleading the stereotypes promoted in tandem by the opposing camps that dominate the discourse on world security are: conservative Western government spokespersons, their think tanks and media coverage on the one hand, and the militant Islamists on the other.[8] In the next section, we will see how the contestation

[7] The producer reportedly invested IDR 7 billion (approximately USD 770,000) or double than the then average cost required of domestic film production.

[8] For instance, a US-based author published an opinion column that appeared in international media; it failed to distinguish between the novel and the film and described *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* as "a vehicle for marketing fundamentalism" that has "been embraced by Indonesian Islamists" and other "common people who don't think critically," much to the writer's regret (Bev 2008). The article appeared in an online media outlet that claims to be "independent of all governments and major media enterprises" and "has no ideology other than a belief in the benefits of a free media".

between those who produced *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and the society at large continued onscreen immediately following the blockbuster.

Cinematic Battle

Less than a year after *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s mega success, it became apparent that the controversy about its Islamic values had not ended. In fact it was only the beginning of a long, intense dispute involving a series of cinematic battles. Two titles are of particular interest: *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (*Woman with a Turban*) (2009, Bramantyo) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (*When Love Has A Tasbih*) (2009, Umam). This section is devoted to a discussion of the two titles, but it is worth noting that many other Islamic titles following the formula of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* have been released, representing a wide range of cinematic quality and offering insight into the market response to this newly discovered market.[9] It should also be borne in mind that none of these titles surpassed *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* in ticket sales or social impact. Perhaps this signals that the fairly conservative form of post-Islamist piety represented in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*—rather than the more pious and didactic variant represented in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* or the boldly liberal one in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, never mind the more staunchly Islamist counterpart—prevails in contemporary Indonesia.

Immediately following the collaboration between the director Bramantyo and the novelist Shirazy, they parted ways. This happened even despite Bramantyo publicly expressing his plan to direct Shirazy's other best-selling novel, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (*Jawa Pos* 2008). With each artist pursuing his divergent variant of post-Islamist piety, the ideological conflicts that surfaced among Indonesia's post-Islamist reformers during the production of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* intensified.

[9] Elsewhere I have discussed the significance of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* as the first commercial feature film that has a female protagonist who appears nearly fully veiled (Heryanto 2011). That it took so long for such a portrayal is odd, not only because Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim nation, but also because its dramatic Islamization had been going on in earnest for more than a decade when the film was produced. Donning a veil among Muslim women was the earliest, most visible, and trendiest evidence of Islamization in the mid-1980s, long before the release of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. After *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s huge success, most Islamized films are promoted in posters featuring an image of women wearing veils.

Perempuan Berkalung Sorban was released in early 2009. Hanung Bramantyo directed and adapted it from a novel of the same title, published in 2001 by the feminist Muslim author Abidah El Khalieqy. It tells the story of Annisa, the daughter of an Islamic teacher living in a local Islamic boarding house, who learns to fight against the gender discrimination she faced since childhood. The film caused more turmoil in the Muslim communities than *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, alienating the director from many of his religious fans and fellows in the industry. If the earlier disagreement between Bramantyo and Shirazy over *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* had put a future collaboration into question, the controversy surrounding the *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* cut short any prospect for rapprochement. Ali Mustafa Yaqub, a senior cleric who served as a deputy on the fatwa commission of the Indonesian Council of Clerics (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI), called on Muslims to boycott the film. On the other hand, local feminists—including Siti Musdah Mulia, the prominent Muslim scholar, former Senior Advisor of Minister of Religious Affairs and former head of the Research Division of the Council of Indonesian Clerics—enthusiastically championed the film. Mulia called on Muslims to defy the boycott (*Jakarta Post* 2009a). According to one source interviewed for this study, some of the film industry's most prominent figures who were committed to Islam gathered in Jakarta to share their outrage about the film and discuss possible strategies to counter it.

Respected film studies scholar, Ekky Imanjaya, published a fierce review of the film, in which he questioned the director's ideological intentions, knowledge of Islam and cinematic skills, under the strongly-worded title "Posisi Ideologis dan Representasi: *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, Membela atau Merusak Nama Islam?" ("Ideological Position and Representation: *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, Defending or Damaging Islam's Reputation?") (2009a). It was published in the respected online journal *Rumah Film*, of which he is a co-founder. Interestingly, his fellow Muslim and *Rumah Film* co-founder Eric Sasono, singled out the same film for commendation: rather than following what had become the standard model for films—focusing on personal piety, career and sentimental love—it attempted to deal with a serious social issue (2010: 59).

The film *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* offers the strongest criticism yet of the darker side of Indonesian patriarchy within the Muslim community.[10] In a public statement, Bramantyo describes the film as

[10] *See* Hellwig (2011) for a discussion of Abidah El Khalieqy's feminist writings.

"payback for what he owed" all the women who had considered *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* degrading to women and biased in favor of polygamy (cited in Imanjaya 2009a). In an interview the novelist El Khalieqy recollected that the *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* novel was commissioned by the Yogyakarta-based Fatayat Welfare Foundation under the auspices of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, with the aim of "socializing the reproductive rights of women that the UN has ratified" (Syaifullah 2009). In the same interview she also acknowledged that she was inspired by the Indonesian translation of Nawal El Sadawi's novel *Emra'a Enda Noktat El Sifr* (*Women at Point Zero*) and a few other feminist literary works that had been widely discussed among student activists in the 1980s and 1990s.

As in El Sadawi's novel, in El Khalieqy's story there is not a single admirable male character (except the short-lived Khudori, Annisa's first love, in the latter). The story is set in a Muslim community and features a Muslim school teacher; critics of the novel and the film have interpreted this as a malicious attack against Muslim authority and indeed Islam itself, rather than a general attack on patriarchy. In the film, nearly all Muslim males, including those who are polygamous, are egoistical, self-serving, irrational, narrow-minded, and intolerant. All are ridiculously conservative and unreasonable. Some are morally corrupt, and others are violently repressive. Annisa's father marries her off for material gains to a man who is an unemployed drunkard and a sexually abusive pervert. What has agitated critics such as Imanjaya is not the depiction of the darker side of the Muslim community (they do not deny such problems exist), but rather that the film does not "cover both sides" or present a light at the end of the tunnel. The film concludes with a scene of Annisa riding a horse with her son at the beach, throwing her turban (an honorable part of Muslim male dress) on the ground. The fallen turban is foregrounded as they move away from the camera.

Critics of the film, as well as the novel, expected the negative depiction of the Muslim community to be balanced out by brighter images of Muslim life. Worse still, as Imanjaya argues, the film seems to imply that Islam offers no solutions for the problems depicted in the film. Worse of all is the fact that the victimized female characters find enlightenment and recourse in the novel *Bumi Manusia* (*Earth of Mankind*) by the late Pramoedya Ananta Toer. It is important to note that Pramoedya's political and literary reputation is as controversial in Indonesia as that of El Sadawi in her homeland of Egypt. The novel *Bumi Manusia* is the first in a series of four semi-historical volumes written while Toer served

more than ten years in exile on the penal island of Buru. He had been sentenced without trial during the New Order's systematic liquidation of the political left, with support from the Western Bloc as well as domestic Muslim organizations. The massacre constitutes the single most important event in Indonesia's history since independence, and yet it is entirely absent from school history books. In 2007 the government banned and burned thousands of copies of a revised history text book that one of its own departments had previously endorsed, because the book deviated from the New Order's official line that demonizes the victims of the 1965–66 massacre (*see* Chapter 4).

Both Toer and his novels have become the target of endless suppressive measures and subjects of controversy.[11] His books were banned by the government. On 13 October 1981, the Office of the Attorney General rejected allegations that they had burned as many as 10,000 copies of *Bumi Manusia* and its immediate sequel *Anak Semua Bangsa* (*Child of All Nations*) by admitting to having burned "only" 972 copies (*Tempo* 1981: 14). In the late 1980s, the state court in Yogyakarta prosecuted three students for possessing and discussing Toer's banned books, and ordered the court to confiscate and destroy their copies. The defendants were charged under the anti-subversion law, which carried a maximum penalty of death. All three students were declared guilty and sentenced to between seven and eight and a half years of imprisonment (for details, *see* Heryanto 2006a).[12]

Against this backdrop, consider that Bramantyo's *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* is the first feature film to present to an Indonesian audience the sight of the book cover on the big screen. The novel appears in no fewer than five scenes of the film, including those in which the heroine reads and cradles a copy of it. There is also a scene that does not exist in the original novel in which male teachers of the Islamic school confiscate copies of Pramoedya's novel and burn them along with several other books deemed undesirable or dangerous. Critics of the film

[11] The tetralogy was a product of research that Pramoedya had conducted from the early 1960s about the origin and formation of the Indonesian nation, "[I]t was a novel to explain why other novels had come into being" (*see* Foulcher 1991: 1). The books have been translated into 33 languages. Ironically, in Indonesia all four volumes of the tetralogy were banned soon after its publication.

[12] Soon after the fall of the New Order in 1998, copies of these banned novels were widely available in most major book stores, in flagrant violation of the ban that has never been legally repealed.

claim that such scenes are unrealistic and present an unfair stereotype of pious Muslims, arguing that even the bigots in the pesantren would not go so far as to burn books.[13]

No less confrontational to most Indonesians, and especially Muslims, is the heroine's sexual assertiveness. Narratives focusing on the suppression of women are common in Indonesia in television or film, but a female victim who stands up and fights back is extremely rare. The few who do are usually portrayed as misguided and often doomed. Likewise, sexually aggressive women are not uncommon in Indonesian cinema, but such characters are often villains. If a film's heroine were both sexually assertive and a pious Muslim, it would be shocking to many, especially in a society undergoing Islamization. At one point, having endured seemingly endless abuse and humiliation from her husband and other male members of her own family, Annisa is excited at the first opportunity to see Khudori after his return from overseas study. He is the only 'good' Muslim male character in the story, and she has been affectionately attached to him from young age.

When the two are alone, she removes her headscarf and invites Khudori to make love to her, then rushes to embrace him. Of special interest is the phrase Annisa uses when she makes her invitation to Khudori. Instead of using terms that would be considered neutral or secular like "*tiduri aku*" or "*setubuhi aku*" (both meaning "make love to me"), she says "*zinahi aku*". Unlike the more neutral or secular words for "adultery" like "*seleweng*", "*serong*" or "*selingkuh*", the word "*zinah*" is derived from Arabic, and has a heavy religious overtone, emphasizing the sinfulness of the act. Annisa's choice of expression emphasizes her conscious and bold defiance of the religious moral code that prevails in her environment. Khudori steps back, calms her down and asks her to repent, but it is too late. At that moment Annisa's husband crashes into

[13] One Islamic journal *KabarNet* (2010) describes *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* as a Communist propaganda, and calls Bramantyo "Karl 'Hanung' Marx" in a foreword to an interview with Indonesia's highly respected poet Taufiq Ismail, who is also well known for his strongly anti-Communist stance. At one point the interviewer asked the question "As far as I can recall, the Indonesian Communist Party and its affiliated social organizations burned books written by anti-Communist authors in 1964 or 1965, is that correct, Sir?" and Ismail responded in the affirmative. Ironically, barely four months earlier the book *Lekra Tak Membakar Buku* (*LEKRA Did Not Burn Books*), by Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri dan Muhidin M Dahlan, was one of five books being banned by the Attorney General.

the room with a mob, catching them in this violation of *khalwat,* the religious code that prohibits two adults of the opposite sex who are unrelated by marriage being in private proximity. Accused of adultery, the pair are sentenced to stoning. As the punishment begins, Annisa's mother intervenes with the crowd and boldly challenges anyone in the crowd who has not sinned to cast the first stone at the accused.[14] Quietly, the crowd disperses.

It is against the background of the controversy over *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* that *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* and its sequel were being prepared for release. Those responsible for the production of the film included some people who had been deeply disappointed or offended by *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. These people and their supporters hinted that their upcoming films would serve as a corrective to all the errors about Islam that Bramantyo had made in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. Like *Ayat-Ayat Cinta,* the newer film is based on a best-selling novel by Shirazy. There are other parallels: both stories are set in Egypt, both have main characters who are postgraduate students from Indonesia studying Islam, both have male protagonists who are portrayed as upstanding and flawless, both are tales of love and romantic rivalry between Indonesians, and both feature didactic dialogues on Islamic ethics on issues pertaining to daily life, including romance.

Designed from the start as a corrective to the Islamic films that preceded it, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* distinguished itself in several significant ways; these were emphasized in its publicity campaign. First of all, in contrast to the director Bramantyo's main credentials as a filmmaker and priority of producing a high quality film, the priority of the crew that produced *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* was the propagation of 'correct' Islamic piety. In direct contrast to, and in an implicit criticism of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, they also promised publicly several times that the film would be as faithful to the novel as possible. They relied on the credentials and skills of some of Indonesian cinema's best known, most established figures whose work on Islamic films dated back to long before the release of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, including Chaerul Umam as director and Deddy

[14] Although the film was not explicit in its reference, it is hard for anyone familiar with Christianity to miss the allusion to the "Pericope Adulterae" and the words of Jesus ("He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her", Gospel of John 8:7) spoken by Annisa's mother. A number of Islamic figures raised concerns over this issue, but no public outcry followed.

Mizwar as actor. Perhaps as a way to ensure that the problems that had occurred with *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* would not recur, the novelist Shirazy was directly involved in the production, even taking on a minor role in the film. The overall framework for producing *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* was designed to ensure a more rigorous compliance to the teachings of Islam. Among other things, this means actors and actresses who were not married would not be seen touching each other. An actor's ability to recite the Koran was a requirement used during the casting process.[15]

As mentioned early on, the pursuit of post-Islamist piety in popular cultures is not reducible to a simple matter of faith and piety. Wealth is very much part of the narrative, and having capital is a basic condition for such pursuit. In this regard Imanjaya notes some of the remarkable aspects of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (*KBC*)*:*

> With a budget of 40 billion rupiah (around USD 4 million), *KCB* is the most expensive film ever to be produced in Indonesia. In the first week of its release, it screened in 148 cinemas across the country, breaking the previous record set by Riri Riza's *Laskar Pelangi* (Rainbow Militia, 2008) which appeared at 115 cinemas in its opening week. The sequel, *KCB 2* is due for release nationally on September 17, a few days before *Idul Fitri*.
>
> (2009b)

Ketika Cinta Bertasbih was designed to outdo *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, which had achieved dazzling success well beyond anyone's expectations. An all-out promotional effort was deployed to ensure both its commercial and moral success. Endorsements from top politicians with strong Islamic credentials were included in the film's marketing. With a budget more than five times larger than that of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta,* the project brought in significant ticket sales: *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih I* earned 2.4 million by the middle of the year and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih II* earned 1.4 million by year's end. However, neither the original nor its sequel surpassed the record set by *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. Most film reviewers were critical of the cinematic merits of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, and they could not help comparing it to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* unfavorably (e.g., Hidayah 2009). Being less controversial, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* failed to generate the same level of lively public discussion that *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* had achieved so inadvertently.

[15] During casting, the performances of the finalists were televised nationally in the style of a reality talent show.

Looking Back

Prior to the release of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, Indonesia already had a long history of producing Islamic films. While a complete survey of the history of the genre is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to acknowledge that both Chaerul Umam, the director of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, and Deddy Mizwar, an actor in the film, were two legends and are among the most highly respected figures in the national cinema and stage performing arts whose work had strong Islamic themes. Chaerul Umam had earned a reputation as a director concerned with conveying Islamic messages long before Indonesia entered its current period of vigorous Islamization. Among his works are *Al Kautsar* (a section of the Koran) (1977), *Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh* (*A Bridge As Narrow as One Seventh Split of A Piece of Hair*) (1982), *Nada dan Dakwah* (*Tune and Preach*) (1991), and *Fatahillah* (name of a legendary Islamic figure from the fifteenth century who fought the Portuguese) (1997), just to name a few of the more celebrated titles. Umam directed many films without religious themes as well, but gained wide respect for his contribution in the area of Islamic film. He was one of the earliest to take on the risky task of producing Islamic-themed titles under the New Order rule when political Islam was officially declared a suspect.

Deddy Mizwar's commitment to propagating Islamic values in culture and the arts through cinema and television caught the public's attention later on in his career. However, unlike his senior Chaerul Umam, Mizwar has shown a near total commitment to Islamic causes, especially in the previous decade or so. In this sense of expressing religious commitment, his creative work is more comparable to the novelist Shirazy. For the past several years, Mizwar's credentials in Islamic screen culture in Indonesia have been unrivalled.

Both men have offered public critiques of Bramantyo's Islamic films, questioning his knowledge of Islam. Mizwar has largely been dismissive of Bramantyo's depiction of Islam. Chaerul Umam has been less forgiving in his evaluation and criticism. In one media interview when asked about the call for a boycott of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, Umam replied that a boycott was inadequate: "I think, this is a crime, and must be brought to the court. The Council of Film Censor is also implicated for having let it go to the public" (Anshor 2009). Indeed, having both Chaerul Umam and Deddy Mizwar connected to *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* has made the showdown between that film and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* an ideological battle over contemporary Islamization in screen culture. To

understand why *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* has been more controversial and popular than any other Islamic film, it is instructive to compare it to two earlier films: *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* (*The End of the World is Near*) (2003, Mizwar) and *Catatan Si Boy* (*Boy's Notes*) (1987, Cheppy).

One of Mizwar's best-known directorial work is on *Kiamat Sudah Dekat*. It was originally released in 2003 as a feature film; in 2005, it was adapted as a television drama, where it achieved even greater popularity.[16] Highly entertaining and witty, the storyline presents a clash of civilizations within a romantic framework. *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* tells the story of Fandy, a young Americanized Indonesian rocker who has just returned to Jakarta after growing up in the US, and Sarah, the shy and beautiful daughter of Haj Romli (played by Deddy Mizwar himself), a very conservative and protective man who is also a very pious Muslim. Comic tensions develop between the ridiculously awkward Fandy, who is head over heels in love with Sarah, and her father Romli, who suspects Fandy of trying to seduce his daughter. In Romli's eyes, Fandy is a hopelessly decadent and un-Islamic young man. However, having been subjected to Fandy's persistent entreaties to allow him to date Sarah, Romli agrees, conditional upon Fandy's success at passing a test of Islamic knowledge, attitudes and behavior in two weeks' time. Through a long series of episodes, the filmmaker follows Fandy's spiritual journey toward becoming a good Muslim. In presenting that journey, the filmmaker extends an invitation to the film's viewers to find salvation, demonstrating how to do it step by step. The film sends a clear message to the Indonesian youth audience more generally: no matter how rebellious, secular, Westernized, or decadent one is, it is never too late to self-correct; there is always hope of becoming a good Muslim, and it is worth the effort because one will be rewarded well beyond one's wildest dreams. Not only does Fandy succeed in passing the tests in order to win Romli's approval and a relationship with Sarah, he also sincerely transforms himself and his family in the process of learning about Islam. His religious piety exceeds everyone's expectations and transcends his original motive of marrying Sarah.

From one perspective, *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* is no less entertaining or religiously correct than *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, or even most other Indonesian films for that matter; perhaps it is even more so. It won one

[16] On 28 April 2006, The Bandung Film Festival granted five awards to the television drama (*Koran Tempo* 2006). In 2007, the television series entered its third season.

award and was well received among film critics but *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* neither did well at the box office nor sparked the kind of enthusiastic public discussions that *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* did. Why? I think one possible explanation can be found in how *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* distinguishes itself from *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* and nearly all previous Islamic-oriented films. In most Islamic films, young Indonesians are presented either as seriously pious Muslims whose behavior, speech and thought make them seem older than their age. Alternatively, as in the case of *Kiamat Sudah Dekat*, these young Indonesians appear as objects of derision for their naivety and shortcomings who need 'good and necessary' discipline, parental surveillance and correction from an old and wise male figure. In contrast, in the world of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the young people who occupy center stage are portrayed not only as youthful, hip, fun-loving and intelligent, but also as thoughtful, unpretentious and fully aware of what is and what is not morally and religiously appropriate. More importantly, they have greater agency throughout the narrative. In the *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film (more so than in the novel), despite the fact that they submit to polygamous marriage, the female characters have more agency than the male protagonist. Rather than being the object of discipline and ridicule, or an unrealistic model made in the image of the conventional Muslim elder, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* presents a world of young people talking to each other about what matters most to them. Even when young people seek advice from the elders, it is depicted as conscious acts of agency in which the young characters decide to seek the advice of respected elders at a time and place of their choice. This greater agency is surely not the sole reason for *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s spectacular success. Earlier in this chapter I provided several other possible reasons for the film's great success. This comparison with *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* simply adds one more quality that makes *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* rather novel.

The film that is highly comparable to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* would be the 1980s–90s hit *Catatan Si Boy* (*Boy's Notes*), in terms of its level of commercial success, its capacity to start a trend, and the popularity of a male protagonist who has relations with multiple women and exhibits a notable religious piety. *Catatan Si Boy* was based on a 1985 radio drama series aired by the Jakarta-based Radio Prambors, one of the most popular stations among young Jakartans and one of the most important sponsors of the Indonesian pop music events in the 1980s. The film had four sequels between 1988 and 1990. For purposes of the present discussion I refer to all the five titles as a collective in the singular and exclusive of a spin-off title that was released under the title *Catatan Harian*

Si Boy (*Si Boy's Diary*) (2011, Tuta), in which the main protagonist, now aged, appears only briefly. His past life connects only marginally to a drama involving a new cast of main characters. Due to space constraints, let me highlight only one major similarity and one major difference between these two films in the broadest terms with specific purpose of elaborating the later discussion.[17] *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *Catatan Si Boy* can each be seen as an attempt to offer an ideological alternative or counter-statement to the modernist logic that was dominant at the time of their respective production; one being secular (*Catatan Si Boy* when Indonesia was under the New Order regime) and the other religion-based (*Ayat-Ayat Cinta* in post-New Order Indonesia, when Islamization ran high).

The film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* can be read as an expression of liberal-minded post-Islamism during the decade-long fervor of Indonesia's Islamism and the rise of Islamist politics. Fahri, the male protagonist, is deeply religious. He also possesses many attractive qualities—youthfulness, stylishness, familiarity with the world and current trends—but his religious credibility is his core attribute, around which those more worldly qualities are built. More importantly, Fahri responds to everything around him from the perspective of his faith, even those aspects of life that do not seem in themselves to be religious in nature. In other words, these are aspects of social life that may not be 'Islamic', but 'Islamized' (*see* Chapter 2). However admirably strong in faith, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s protagonist is still hopelessly unprepared to fight and defend himself when other characters beat him up. He is consistently confused or submits to the pressures of the women who are in love with him. The film was doubly refreshing to Indonesian public in the wake of the collapse of New Order regime and the decline of machismo, as well as the aftermath of the many bombings in the name of Islamist jihadism. Not accidentally, perhaps, this historical moment was well reflected in the public profile of the country's incumbent and first directly-elected president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. He is a former general who

[17] For more comments, comparing the protagonists of the two films, see the insightful opinion column by film critic Eric Sasono (2008b). Krishna Sen (1991) is one the earliest and most compelling analyses of the film *Catatan Si Boy*. David Hanan's comments on *Catatan Si Boy* in comparison to another domestic blockbuster mentioned earlier *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* is no less relevant to our discussion (Hanan 2008).

dressed in civilian clothes rather than military uniform. During his presidency he repeatedly disappointed his supporters and the general public because of his indecisiveness. At the same time, he took such great pride in his singing talents that he released three albums. This was the same president who repeatedly shed tears at the screening of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*.

Although operating similarly as a counter-statement to the norm of the day, *Catatan Si Boy* has the opposite attributes because its social and political contexts were remarkably different from that of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. The older film represents an expression of the 'post-secularism' (*see* Chapter 2) that occurred at the height of New Order's secularist-militarist regime, which maintained an ambitious project that led to impressive sustained economic growth for two decades, during which Islamic politics was severely suppressed and until 1990 had to grow underground. In stark contrast to Fahri in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the protagonist Boy in *Catatan Si Boy* is the personification of the abundant material success of Indonesia's new rich in the capital city in the 1980s and 1990s. He is a great street fighter and womanizer. Many of the scenes in *Catatan Si Boy* display the flamboyant lifestyle and trappings of wealthy Indonesian families living the American dream that was widely marketed in Indonesia via Hollywood films: fancy cars, luxurious homes, frequent travel to London or Los Angeles, holidays at the beach, and partying at nightclubs. The one aspect of Hollywood that the film does not emulate is sex scenes or any allusions to them. Twice the protagonist refuses invitations for sex with a woman even though the two are already in the bedroom. However, quite unexpectedly and rather oddly in the structure of the narrative are a series of brief scenes of the protagonist displaying peripheral qualities of his religiosity as a Muslim: praying or having a *tasbih* (for Muslim prayer) as an accessory in his fancy car. In this film, only the protagonist is shown performing a religious act like praying, and he does so rarely and inconsistently. For instance, only occasionally does he greet others with the standard Muslim phrase *assalamulaikum*—'may peace be with you'.

In contrast to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the religious aspects of the protagonist in *Catatan Si Boy* are so minimal and superficial that they can be completely eliminated without compromising the integrity or coherence of the film. In no instance does the protagonist consider (as Fahri in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* consistently does) the series of conflicts that develops throughout the story from a religious perspective. Despite their minimal and peripheral status in *Catatan Si Boy*, these Islamized elements excited many Indonesian youth and sparked many comments in the media. They

were striking not only because they seemed unprecedented in Indonesian films not specifically promoted as Islamic, but also because this took place in the period when Islam was still declared suspect. In retrospect, *Catatan Si Boy* can be seen as one of the earliest and successful cinematic expressions of Indonesian post-Islamist (or post-secularist) aspiration. Two decades later, and under a very different social circumstances that privileged all things Islamic, such aspiration found its full-fledged articulation in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*.

Beyond Commodity/Religion Dichotomy

In the foregoing I focused on the contestation between the variants of Indonesia's post-Islamism in the arena of screen culture, as distinct from the tension that runs between all of them and those with a stronger Islamist political orientation, for whom any propagation of the sacred using the commercial enterprise of film industry is fundamentally flawed. Even within the narrow selection of films discussed above, the divergent roads taken by artists such as Bramantyo and Shirazy that began with the production of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* have continued after the completion of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*. In 2010 Shirazy took on the task of directing *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (*Under the Arch of Love*), an adaptation of another of his novels. In 2011 Bramantyo's film, titled with the single punctuation of a question mark (*?*), came under strong attack from the aggressive Islamist militia FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Islam Defending Front), ironically a group whose violent actions were depicted anonymously in the film. Through explicit and widely publicized threats of violence, the FPI managed to force both the government of the city of Bandung (May 2011) and SCTV, a major national television network based in Jakarta (September 2011), to cancel screenings of the film. All the above constitutes only a fragment of the larger and more complex disputes about the appropriate place of religion and morality in state administration, public space, and private domains that took place among members of the Muslim community and beyond in this overwhelming diverse nation. However, as I argued above, to analyze the dispute as a purely religious affair would be missing the point.

In an earlier section of this chapter I argued that one important reason for the dazzling success of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* was its hybridity: blending elements of Islamic texts with un-Islamic formulas borrowed from the global entertainment industry of Hollywood and Bollywood, as well as local soap operas. It must be strongly emphasized that the film,

by virtue of this uniquely balanced composition, has achieved heights both in commercial terms as well as in the moral battle currently raging in contemporary Indonesia. All the other films discussed above also contain some degree of hybridity; however, with the exception of *Catatan Si Boy* in its own time, none has had the same impact upon the public life as *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. The other films brought in too much or too little of either religious and moral didactism or secular liberalism. The fact that *Catatan Si Boy* enjoyed comparable success in its time conveys two important messages: firstly, there is no static formula for the degree of hybridity that will guarantee the long-term success of a commercial feature film locally and internationally; and secondly, the efficacy of a particular hybridity is ultimately subject to the broad, changing, and messily complex ideological contestation and power relations in the society at large.

In one of the most insightful essays in Indonesian on a related topic, Mushthafa (2008) distinguishes and compares what he refers to as "Islamic" versus "Pesantren" (Islamic boarding school) literary works. To summarise his sophisticated essay, the former represents the newly Islamic that is currently in vogue in Indonesia and that has also led to vibrant new productions and a celebration of Islamic films. According to Mushthafa, this new wave of strongly and consciously Islamic propagation is the collective work of a modernist urban middle-class intelligentsia combating what they believe to be the threats to true Islamic life in the country: secularism and hedonism in popular culture. Mushthafa specifically mentions the work of Forum Lingkar Pena (*see* endnote 6, this chapter) and its presumed association with the Islamist-oriented Justice and Prosperity Party as the driving force behind this enormously successful campaign that films such as *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* have spearheaded. Perhaps in line with their self-confidence and militanism, the works of this group is marred by "excessive use of [Islamic] icons, which leads to formalistic religious dogmas", according to Mushthafa.

Mushthafa contrasts these Islamic literary works with their Pesantren-style counterparts, identifying novelists Ahmad Tohari and Abidah El-Khalieqy (author of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*) as examples of the greater commitment to substantive issues of human liberation and political inclusiveness than a preoccupation with the symbolic values of Islam. While it is obvious that Mushthafa is biased in favor of Pesantren literature than Islamic literature, his essay also offers a critique of those who run the pesantrens for their alleged failure to recognize the difference between these two types of literary works so devoured by many

of the young and impressionable female students at the pesantrens. To an important extent, Mushthafa's views are in accord with Nancy Smith-Hefner's findings about the difference between recently converted devout female Muslims from the secular institutions and Muslim feminist activists from religious schools (2007: 403). The former conscientiously assert their religious piety in public, as if inadvertently expressing a sense of insecurity. In contrast, because the latter group is secure in its faith, they can pursue their interests in other issues, such as the inclusive politics of difference and pluralism.

I have tried to argue elsewhere (Heryanto 2011) that in today's Indonesia we witness both processes of 'Islamization of modernity' as well as 'modernization of Islam'. Any scholarly investigation on the growing and glowing popularity of Islamic films that confines itself narrowly to the question of religious merits (or lack thereof) risks missing the broader perspective and more critical insight into what these films' success reveals about contemporary Indonesia. The cinematic contest discussed in this chapter represents the complex process of what has widely been called Islamization. The same contest responds to the larger political conflict offscreen as the nation attempts to redefine its project for modernity. For these reasons, the subsequent chapters will go on to show the other domains of the battle, although the critical links to the issues of Islamization past and present are not always publicly acknowledged.

CHAPTER 4

A Past Dismembered and Disremembered

The previous two chapters show how Indonesia's Islamization has been the single outstanding feature that altered the nation and its visual representation, which took multiple and contested forms. Popular screen cultures such as television programs and films formed significant sites for this contest. Anyone with no or little familiarity with Indonesia may find the recent rise of Islamization odd, especially in light of the fact that this is the world's largest Muslim nation. Even if the state is committed to remaining officially secular, as it has always been, it remains curious as to why it is only recently that social life has undergone Islamization to the unprecedented extent that it has. Arguably, there are both *internal* and *external* factors that have been responsible. For now, we must leave most of the richer and more complex history of this matter. For the immediate purposes of this book, it will suffice to note some of the more important factors.

Internally, the majority of Muslims in Indonesia have adopted a significantly syncretic approach to their religious practice for centuries, professing Islam while retaining various vernacular traditions and elements of Hinduism and Buddhism that came to the archipelago prior to Islam. This is especially evident on the island of Java, which accommodates more than half of the population. For some of the more pious, modernist and well-educated Muslims, this general practice is a cause for concern as it represents heresy or a compromised or corrupted form of religious observance. In other cases, tensions arise due to the adoption of different streams or sects within Islam. Tensions between the various forms of religious adherence have never ceased since the arrival of Islam on Indonesian shores. Most of the time, they do not lead to violent confrontation on a massive scale. Violent conflicts took place more frequently from the late nineteenth century and throughout the nation's struggle for

independence, when modernist Islamists took more active measures to promote a more purist view of Islam and pursue a more Islamic Indonesia. Internal violence has recently escalated as Islamization has unfolded rapidly, and in a refractory fashion at times. Multiple attempts by some Islamist groups to enshrine Islamic laws in the constitution have repeatedly failed. As noted in earlier chapters, even at the height of Islamization today, Islamist-based political parties have consistently performed poorly in the national parliamentary elections; at the time of writing, there were no signs they would dominate in the near future.

No less importantly, and more relevant to this and the next chapter, two *external* forces have retained Islam as a more dormant force in Indonesian politics for much of the past two centuries. The first of these forces is the secular-oriented colonial and subsequently independent governments that, until 1990, have been unsympathetic to Islamist politics, demonstrating a token measure of accommodating what were fairly weak (and weakened) Islam-based political parties and cultural events. In the previous chapters, I discussed how and why President Suharto made an about-face in policy in 1990 and began courting Islamic political activists in an attempt to revive his grip on power. The second external mitigating force was the Left, comprising the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party) and other populist and secular nationalist parties and organizations that have resisted any attempts to make Indonesia more Islamic. Although links and alliances of convenience have existed between the Communist-oriented and Islamist political activists during the struggle for national independence in the early decades of the twentieth century, such familarity was short-lived, and much of that history has now been erased from public memory in contemporary Indonesia. Indeed, the spectacular and rapid process of contemporary Islamization since the final decade of the past century has been made possible by, among other things, the slaughter of the Left in the last three months of 1965, which historians have described as being one of the largest massacres in modern history. Who exactly was responsible for the massacre remains in dispute, although growing literature on the topic suggests that the army generals, under the leadership of Suharto, played a key role and reaped the greatest benefit from it, as many anti-Communist civilians, members of various Islamic organizations, and local militias took a very active part in the violent operation. The Western Bloc of the Cold War lent strong support to Suharto during the tumultuous years, and enjoyed a significant share of political and economic benefits from the Suharto's long reign of dictatorship.[1]

This chapter and the next will examine the critical role of film as a medium of propaganda in the hands of the New Order government, as well as a medium of counter-narrative in the hands of independent filmmakers since the fall of the New Order in 1998. The importance of links between film and the history of the 1965–66 massacres, which gave rise to Indonesia's New Order regime (1966–98), cannot be overemphasized.[2] Based on critical examination of existing short films and documentaries that revisit the 1965 events, participant observation of several events of their screening, interviews, and a review of the broader contexts relevant to this examination, this chapter will offer one tentative conclusion. Contrary to the expectations of many who survived the New Order's brutal repression, greater space for openness in public debate in the first decade that followed has not benefitted the attempts towards disclosing truth, building reconciliation, or pursuing justice. The New Order's propaganda remains largely intact well over a decade after it was brought to its knees. Worse still, but not surprisingly, many Indonesians of the younger generation, who enjoy the power of new media technologies and greater freedom of information, appear to have little interest in the past political violence. However, by way of anticipation, I will speculate on a slightly more optimistic scenario in the next chapter.

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[1] In late July 2012, in a 840-page investigative report to the Office of Attorney General, the National Commission of Human Rights officially declared the killings a gross violation of human rights, and named former and deceased military officers who were responsible for the killings, demanding that the Office of Attorney General take further action to bring those responsible to justice. The Commission also released a public statement in a press conference. Immediately President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono made public his endorsement of the Commission's recommendations. However, while many welcomed the statements as symbolic progress, few believe the new document will have any significant impact on those responsible, for their victims, or even on history textbooks and classroom teaching. Countering the President, several members of the parliament sneered at the Commission's report and questioned the value of digging up past violence at the perceived risk of fracturing national unity. In mid-Nov. 2012, the Office of Attorney General issued its official response, rejecting the National Commission of Human Rights report and the latter's claim that the 1965–66 massacre constituted a gross human rights violation.

[2] Two major books in English on Indonesian films made during the New Order (not specifically on the 1965–66 turmoil) are Heider (1991) and Sen (1994). I wish to acknowledge how inspiring these pioneering works have been to my preliminary work in this field.

For the purpose of analyzing the films in question and assessing their political significance, two factors will be considered. The first is a set of fundamental narrative constraints that confront the filmmaker when revisiting a sensitive and repressed topic such as the 1965–66 massacres. I will outline the relevant context that will help the reader appreciate the seriousness of those constraints. The second consideration will highlight the filmmakers' distinct backgrounds and three positions taken by the filmmakers in relation to the issue. Each of these three positions bears some importance for the potential strengths of and challenges to their work. But first, allow me to provide a brief background summary about New Order state-terrorism, and its enthusiastic investment in film as a popular medium for its propaganda machine.

Original Sin

For most of the period of its rule, the New Order government's political legitimacy rested heavily on a manufactured and strictly controlled narrative of the 1965–66 bloodbath. The government did all it could to have maximum control of public consciousness and discourse about the event by consistently imposing an official version of that history. Two specific episodes are of central importance to the regime's position vis-à-vis this history.[3] The first was a series of events that took place in Jakarta on the eve of 1 October 1965 (when six generals and one lieutenant were kidnapped and later killed by a group of middle-ranking military officers) and in the days that immediately followed (after the successful counter-attack against the kidnappers, led by Suharto).[4] Various official pronouncements of the fateful moment made no or little mention of the second episode: the widespread pogrom from October 1965 to mid-1966 of members of the Communist party, its affiliated organizations, and

[3] There have been a great number of writings on these two subjects. For a recent bibliography of events surrounding the 1965 incident, *see* Roosa (2009).

[4] One of the most recent and important contributions to the debate on these events is Roosa (2006). Adam (2008: 39) provides a brief comparative summary of the different versions of the event. For a few samples of previous writings on the subject, *see* (in alphabetical order) Anderson (1987), Anderson and McVey (1971), Bunnell (1990), Crouch (1978), Holtzappel (1979), Kammen and McGregor (2012), May (1978), Scott (1986), Sulistyo (2000), Wertheim (1979).

anyone perceived to have done or said anything deemed sympathetic to any of these then legal organizations. Although a great portion of these killings took place on the islands of Java, Bali and Sumatra, similar incidents also occurred further afield in the eastern islands of Indonesia.

Tens of thousands of other suspected Communists and sympathizers were detained for ten years or longer without trial, during which they experienced multiple forms of torture and forced labor. Many died during this detention. Upon their nominal release in the late 1970s, the survivors and all members of their families (immediate, extended and even unborn) have been systematically deprived of basic civil rights, with restrictions on their mobility as well as access to employment, public services and election participation.[5] Though the terrible suffering is not mentioned in history textbooks and other official documents, the government was not totally secretive about the violence. In fact, the government and their non-government supporters regularly made a public display of their atrocities to intimidate the survivors and their sympathizers (lest they dare to even fantasize about some sort of recourse or revenge) as well as to terrorize the rest of the society (from whom the military dictatorship demanded full acquiescence for the more than 30 years of its rule). Extensive witch-hunts against Communist threats or potential revivals, as well as a cycle of mental and ideological screenings, were vigorously conducted as public spectacles throughout the New Order rule (Heryanto 2006a: Ch. 2).

Early on, the New Order regime recognized the importance of film as a propaganda device. On 15 April 1969, the Commander-in-Chief of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Public Order (Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban, aka KOPKAMTIB) issued an Instruction (Kep-16/KOPKAMTIB/4/1969) for the establishment of a "KOPKAMTIB Film Project", which would be responsible for producing "documentary films" as a "medium of psywar" against its enemies in Indonesia and overseas. However, it took a long time to produce propaganda films that would be fairly "sophisticated"

[5] A small number of random samples of writing on the subject include (in alphabetical order) Budiardjo (1991); Caldwell (1975); Cribb (1990); Farram (2010); Fealy and McGregor (2010); Fein (1993); Heryanto (2006a); Purwadi (2003); Robinson (1995); Roosa, Ratih, and Farid (2004); Sasongko and Budianta (2003); Southwood and Flanagan (1983); Weiringa (2011); and Zurbuchen (2002, 2005).

and "meet the [respectable] standards of cinephiles," as the Instruction stipulated. The first two major state-sponsored propaganda films *Janur Kuning* (*Yellow City Decoration*) (1979, Surawidjaja) and *Serangan Fadjar* (*Attack at Dawn*) (1981, Noer) glorify the little known role of Suharto in a military battle during the nationalist struggle for independence in 1945. The most influential propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* (*The Treachery of the 30th September Movement*) (1984, Noer) was completed in 1984 after two years of production.[6] Two years later another propaganda film was released: *Penumpasan Sisa-sisa PKI Blitar Selatan* (*The Suppression of Remnants of the PKI in South Blitar*) or *Operasi Trisula* (*Trisula Operation*) (1986, Kadarjono), which depicted an extended witch-hunt of Communist survivors by the military in South Blitar, perceived to be the last of the Communist hideouts.

In 1988, the New Order government produced yet another propaganda film: *Djakarta 1966* (1982, Noer), which focused on the controversial transfer of power from President Sukarno to Major General Suharto. At the core of the controversy is the issuance of a Presidential Instruction on 11 March 1966, signed by President Sukarno, and its use or abuse by General Suharto (*TAPOL* 1989). The document in Indonesia is called "Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret" (literally the 11th March Letter of Instruction). The government coined the abbreviation "Supersemar" to refer to it, alluding to the super-powerful character Semar in the Javanese style adoption of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The document authorizes Major General Suharto to restore social order and regain stability of the government, secure the personal safety of the President, and execute all his policies. Two controversies hang over the Instruction; one has to do with its issuance and the other concerns its use or abuse.

An eyewitness, Soekardjo Wilardjito, who was a palace guard in Bogor, later testified that President Sukarno signed the letter while held

[6] There are several variants of the film's title. The opening scene introduces the film as *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. Various advertisements for the film, as well as the album cover for its commercially circulated video compact disk format, refer to it as *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. The official certification from the Film Censorship Institute states the title as *G 30 S PKI*. In most other official documents and statements, the New Order's prescribed tag is *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. Far from being a trivial matter, this phraseology—especially the use of 'PKI' for Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party)—is a highly political issue for the government, as will be elaborated below.

at gun point by Brigadier General Basuki Rachmat,[7] one of four military officers who visited the President in Bogor with a draft letter bearing the military letterhead instead of the presidential palace one. The following day, Wilardjito was detained; he stayed behind bars for the next 14 years without trial. He was so badly tortured during his detention that it left him physically disabled. After his testimony emerged following Suharto's downfall in 1998, he was charged with defamation. Finally, after a decade of legal battle at all levels, the Supreme Court acquitted him of all charges in August 2007 (Heru 2008).

At present, the original document that triggered the controversy has been declared missing (Adam 2010). Regardless of the validity of Wilardjito's testimony and the whereabouts of the original document, Suharto took a series of actions that were clearly in contradistinction to the uncontested message of the 11 March 1966 Instruction. The following day, he outlawed the Indonesian Communist Party, even though the majority of its party members had already been massacred during the six months prior. In the following week, he ordered the arrest of Sukarno's ministers and formed a new cabinet. Sukarno, having been sidelined, was placed under house arrest until his death in 1970.

In the 1987 general elections, a sea of Sukarno's images flooded the public space during the campaign period in support of the loyalist-opposition party Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (Indonesian Democratic Party). The scene so shocked the government officers that such a display of images was banned in the next election. A series of smear campaigns against Sukarno ensued immediately after the New Order party secured its predictable victory in the 1987 elections. It was against such a political background that the film *Djakarta 1966* (1982, Noer) was released and acquired political significance. During the evening of the film's preview inside the Presidential Palace, Suharto remarked emphatically and repeatedly "there was never a military coup d'état" in the 1965–66 transfer of power (*Kompas* 1988).

No other propaganda material, on or offscreen, has generated a similar impact to *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. The film broke new records in terms of runtime (nearly 4.5 hours), the number of supporting actors (10,000 people) and viewers, as well as scoring record financial investment and revenue (Kristanto 1984). School children were required

[7] Major streets in several cities of Indonesia are named 'Basuki Rachmat'; he was awarded the title of 'National Hero' the year he died in 1969.

to buy tickets to watch it during school hours.[8] Despite its marathon-length runtime, the story in this film concerns only a five-day period between 30 September and 5 October 1965 (the first of two critical episodes in the history outlined above). The focus of the film is on the Communists' attacks against Muslim landowners before September 1965, a dramatized version of the killing of the seven military officers on the eve of 1 October 1965, and the infamous scene of a Communist female orgy, which was a fabricated depiction of naked members of the leftist organization Indonesian Women's Movement (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia, GERWANI) dancing and singing while mutilating the bodies of the generals at a place called Lubang Buaya (for more, *see* Wieringa 2011).[9] As mentioned earlier, the film is completely silent about the second episode (the massacres), although the less known sequel *Penumpasan Sisa-sisa PKI Blitar Selatan* (1986, Kadarjono) glorifies the destruction of the fleeing Communists.

However, more important than those record-breaking statistics is the fact that for at least the first decade of its circulation, the film was the primary, or only available, source of detailed information for most Indonesians about what might have happened in September to October 1965. The state television network, TVRI, broadcast the film annually on each 30 September anniversary. Private television stations were required to follow suit.[10] The film established the central and overarching framework for any public discussion, fantasy or allusion for most of the New

[8] The violent scenes in the film are so intense that one should question its appropriateness for viewing by the underaged. Entitled "Fever and Screams When Viewing the Film G30S/PKI", one journalistic report describes the traumatic experience of the young students who have previously watched it (Listyaningsih 1990). But one commentator during a preview of the film at the palace remarked that the scenes at Lubang Buaya "are not sadistic enough" (*Tempo* 1984: 78).

[9] Adam contends that there is some exaggeration of the Communist hostility against the Muslims in the village of Kanigoro as depicted in the film (Adam 2004). Stories about such an orgy were propagated by the military-owned print media and soon spread like wild fire, galvanizing a mass anti-Communist frenzy in the chaotic early days of Oct. 1965. The same story of the Lubang Buaya orgy has been immortalized in the dioramas and relief at the Lubang Buaya Museum (East Jakarta), built in 1990. Such a depiction, however, contradicts the official autopsies conducted by a team of five forensic experts under the order of Major General Suharto himself. *See* Anderson (1987) for a translation of the documents and a helpful introductory note.

[10] As if all the above were not enough, the government also required all television networks air a television drama series to supplement the film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. These include *Terjebak* (*Trapped*) in 1996, and *Nyanyian Dua Bersaudara*

Order period. Any public expression that implied doubt in the validity of the official history of 1965 or made reference to alternative narratives among scholars overseas was declared against the law and was liable to criminal prosecution. Notwithstanding such intimidation, dissenting voices emerged from time to time during the New Order rule, if only to be immediately suppressed. This suppression has continued at the time of writing, more than a decade since the downfall of the New Order.

For many Indonesians, Communism was, and remains still, a taboo subject for any critical discussion, but the word "Communist" functioned as a popular derogatory term. In August 1985, in commemoration of the 40th year of Indonesian independence, the nation's most respected news magazine, *Tempo*, conducted a poll. When asked what the most serious threat to Indonesia was, over one third of the total respondents (around 900, mostly from Java and Sumatra) gave the single most frequent answer: the potential resurgence of the Communists (*Tempo* 1985).[11] More than half of these respondents were between 21 and 30 years old. The daily *Kompas* conducted similar polls in 2002 and 2003 (Satrio 2002, 2003), and the results affirmed the *Tempo* survey. Two years into the post-New Order era, *Tempo* held another round of polls, canvassing 1,101 secondary school students from the nation's three largest cities (Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan). To the question of where they had learned the history of the 1965 events, 90 per cent responded "film".[12] As there was only one film on the subject, there is no ambiguity as to

(*A Song of Two Siblings*) in 1997 (Kompas 1998). In the following May (1998) Suharto lost power, and his Vice-President B.J. Habibie took over his position. To give the appearance that his government was distinct from the New Order regime, now in disgrace, the requirement for all television networks to annually air the 4.5 hours and then 14-year-old film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* was terminated. However, all television networks were still required to air a series of three newly produced anti-Communist propaganda television dramas: *Bukan Sekedar Kenangan* (*Not Just Memory*) on 30 Sept., *Melacak Jejak Berkabut* (*Tracing Footsteps in Mist*) 14 Oct., and *Sumpah Kesetiaan* (*Oath of Loyalty*) on 28 Oct." (*Kompas* 1998).

[11] The second perceived threat to the nation for all the respondents was 'corruption' (18.42 per cent), a response amounting to slightly more than half of those who perceived Communism as the most dangerous threat (33.65 per cent). Interestingly in retrospect, 'radical Islam' occupied the second to last place in the list of potential threats, with barely 1 per cent of the total number of answers.

[12] Respondents in this poll were invited to give more than one answer to the question. At the top of the list was "teachers and text books" (97 per cent); "film" came second (*Tempo* 2000).

which film they were referring to. As many as 97 per cent said they had seen the film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. Asked how many times they had seen it, the largest percentage of respondents had seen with the highest frequency: 38 per cent of respondents had seen it more than three times.

In the early 2000s, the somewhat liberal-leaning but short-lived government of Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001) decided to revise the curriculum for secondary schools, slightly modifying the existing story and toning down the demonization of the Communists. New textbooks were prepared in ways that would fit the new curriculum and were published by private companies. However, in the middle of June 2005, the House Speaker Agung Laksono made a statement that marked the beginning of a long and emotionally charged controversy that was to last for two years. He questioned the new history textbooks that in his view "whitewashed" the crimes of the Communists. After a series of investigations by the Department of Education and the Attorney's Office, on 5 March 2007, the office of the Attorney General issued a ban on 26 secondary school history textbooks already in circulation on the pretext that these books did not conform to New Order propaganda by their omission of the official allegations of Communist wrongdoings in a number of political conflicts such as Madiun in 1948 and Jakarta in 1965 (Kustiani 2007).[13] Law enforcers were mobilized to repossess the circulated books and to supervise the burning of thousands of copies (Baskoro 2007; Febiana 2007a; Hamluddin 2007; Sutisna 2007). In addition, the government was determined to produce a new history textbook (Febiana 2007b). However, most of the newest, pro-New Order leaning textbooks

[13] In the New Order's standard propaganda, the Communist Party is portrayed as a permanent traitor to the nation from time immemorial for its repeated attempts to topple legitimate governments. In the New Order's early years, reference was made to Communist treason in 1926, 1948 and again in 1965. In each of these years the Communists were fiercely attacked, before the Party was completely slaughtered once and for all. According to New Order propaganda, however, the latest eradication is never enough, because "Communism never dies", *see* Heryanto (1999b). In the New Order's narrative, the author keeps the Communists alive in a cycle of being invented, hunted down, tortured, killed, and then revived again. After several years of public dissemination, the reference to Communist rebellion in 1926 was dropped. Belatedly, New Order spokespersons came to realize that the Indonesian nation-state was non-existent at that time and thus the implication of Communist subversion in 1926 was a heroic act of nationalist struggle for independence from Dutch colonialism, *see* Heryanto (2006a: 141).

available in bookstores were riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions (Tan 2008).

The reproduction of the New Order's anti-Communist campaign did not stop there. In ways that are highly reminiscent of Suharto's New Order at its peak and the global Cold War in full swing (Heryanto 2006a), a series of measures were taken to contain any signs that might in any small way be construed as a potential signal for Communist revival. The sight of the hammer and sickle image in an art exhibition at a gallery (*Suara Merdeka* 2004), on a well-wishing banner, in an English course textbook (Syahirul 2007), and on a t-shirt (*Kompas* 2006), all prompted a knee-jerk reaction from local security authorities. They confiscated the suspect property and temporarily detained the individuals deemed responsible. One easy way to understand the persistence of this seemingly obsolete anti-Communism is to recognize how little has changed within the core groups that make up the top political elite in post-New Order Indonesia:

> elements of the ancien régime have clearly remained powerful in various aspects of post-Suharto Indonesian politics. However, the changed environment requires a reconfiguration of power and its mechanics … Nonetheless, the appropriation of public institutions and resources for private accumulation, the leitmotif of the New Order, remains a defining feature of the post-Suharto political economy … 'Uncivil' society groups like paramilitaries and organizations that host political gangsters—often linked with political parties or related mass organizations—have also become increasingly important players.
>
> (Heryanto and Hadiz 2005: 256)

Given the rise in challenges to the New Order propaganda (and fears of possible retaliation for the legal consequences of their complicity in New Order era crime), apprehension may well have prevailed among the political elite whose interests lie in maintaining the status quo and selected legacies of the ancien régime. The impact of the New Order propaganda on the masses, as well as on the elite whose interests are best served by such propaganda, cannot be underestimated. Anti-Communism is today as alive and kicking among non-state agencies and social groups, including the militias and organized gangs as it was half a century earlier (*see* Chapter 5).

In October 2004 a group of Surabaya residents posted huge banners condemning the cruelty of Communists in the world and reminding residents of the past crimes of Indonesian Communists (Rahardjo 2004).

In Bandung in 2008, the much-feared militia groups Islam Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) and Pancasila Youth (Pemuda Pancasila) staged a rally demanding further vigilance against Communism. In neither incident was it clear what impetus might have prompted this kind of public statement. One does not need to show sympathy for the Communists or the victims of 1965 in order to provoke hostility from such anti-Communist groups. An analytical discussion of Marxism would suffice. In late 2006 a group calling itself the Anti-Communist Society (Permak) raided a bookstore in Bandung that was holding a discussion on Marxism. Instead of protecting those who were under attack, the local police detained the speaker and organizers of the event and charged them with violating the criminal code for spreading banned ideas (Suwarni 2006).[14]

In late 2009, a radio station in Solo was the target of intimidating protests by scores of people belonging to the so-called Corp Hizbullah Divisi Sunan Bonang, who arrived in military-styled camouflage uniforms with their faces covered by a jihadi-style hood. What provoked the protestors was a once-popular song in Javanese called "Genjer-genjer", which the station had broadcasted. According to the New Order's propaganda, mentioned earlier, GERWANI sang this song in 1965 during an orgy and mutilated the bodies of the seven senior military officers. Since then the song had been declared illegal by association. The protestors in the city of Solo in 2009 demanded a public apology from the radio station for "spreading the spirit of Communism", and the station managers bowed to their demand (Rafiq 2009). By the end of 2009, the Office of the Attorney General had banned five books, two of which challenged the New Order's narrative of 1965.

Endless Contestations

As in the period of the New Order, the current situation has been far from monolithic. The imposition of the official narrative and the emergence of myriad forms of counter-narratives can be found both during and after the New Order periods of rule. Elsewhere I have discussed the situation under the New Order rule, with many examples to suggest

[14] In the early 1990s, three university students were sentenced to between six and eight and a half years of imprisonment for attending similar discussions and circulating banned novels. They were found guilty under the anti-subversion law, which carried a maximum penalty of death, *see* Heryanto (2006a: Chaps. 3 and 4).

that no authoritarian rule can possibly impose total repressive domination without self-contradictions, gaps, and subversive responses from the population (Heryanto 2006a). In the following section, I wish to present a number of cases from more recent times, to further illustrate the complex and often contradictory nature of the post-New Order condition.

Because the New Order stigmatized the song "Genjer-genjer", both New Order propagandists and anti-New Order Indonesians have used it for conflicting purposes.[15] The New Order propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September/PKI* used the song as part of its effort to demonize the Left (Heryanto 2006a: 6–9, 11–16), while sympathizers of the Left have used the song in order to valorize it. Artists in Yogyakarta played and sang the song as part of a performance that was ideologically left-leaning (Fadjri 2004). The song appeared in the full feature film *Gie* (2005, Riza), the documentary film *Putih Abu-abu; Masa Lalu Perempuan* (*Grey White; Women's Past*) (2006, Primonik, Kumalawati, Yanuar, and Ramadhan), and the American documentary film *40 Years of Silence* (2009, Lemelson). The song was composed by Muhammad Arief before he became affiliated with the Institute of People's Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, LEKRA), an organization affiliated with the PKI. Although various leftist groups in the mid-1960s liked the song enormously and helped promote it, its popularity extended far beyond the Left political circles. Several prominent artists who had no affiliation with the Left had included this piece in their recordings (e.g., pop singers Lilies Surjani and Bing Slamet) or live performances (such as the eminent shadow puppeteer Ki Nartosabdo) (Budi 2009; Parlindungan 2007; Utomo 2005).

In May 2003 the University of Indonesia's Law Faculty proposed that the XXV/MPRS/1966 Decree of the Provisional Council of the People's Assembly be consigned to the dustbin of history (*Kompas* 2003). This was the decree that banned the Indonesian Communist Party and declared any spreading of Communism-Marxism and Leninism illegal, with the exception of academic analysis in institutions of higher learning. As expected, many in the government and in non-governmental groups fiercely opposed the proposal. The fact that it was put forth by such a prestigious body and was seriously debated among the country's elite constituted an important event in itself. Major bookshops in the country

[15] The case of "Genjer-genjer" exemplifies how the dominant creates and determines the nature of resistance to itself. This issue will be touched upon again in discussion of the films *Djedjak Darah* and *Mass Grave* in the next section.

were swamped by leftist books in the early 2000s, including titles that were still banned, such as novels by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (*Kompas* 2000a, 2000b). In 2005, young activists in collaboration with former political prisoners from 1965 celebrated the publication of the Indonesian translation of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (Taufiqurrahman 2005).

In late February 2004, the Constitutional Court made another historic ruling to restore the rights of the victims of 1965 by amending previous laws (Laws 3/1999 and 12/2003) that had allowed these citizens to vote but forbade them from participating as candidates in the parliamentary elections of April 2004 (Saraswati 2004).[16] In another sign of progress, former political prisoners launched a legal battle in 2005 against the decades of injustice they had endured by suing all the previous presidents of Indonesia (Suharto, B.J. Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati Soekarnoputri, and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) (Can 2005). To the surprise of many, after serious administrative scrutiny, the state court decided to accept their indictment as valid, and decreed that the trial should proceed. Although the court ultimately reached the decision to drop the charges and exonerate the accused, this final decision did not come without extended anxieties among many, including threats of violence from the Islam Defenders Front (Diani 2005).

Outside the series of battles outlined above, small pockets of reconciliatory attempts have brought together those who were in opposite political camps in the 1960s. One of the most important examples of this is the work of a non-governmental organization called Syarikat, founded by human rights activists within Nahdatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organization in the country and widely suspected of complicity in the killings of the Left in 1965.[17] The remarkable legal reform enacted by the Constitutional Court in 2004 (mentioned above) was initiated by the tireless efforts of a group of former political enemies from the 1960s—from both the left and right poles of the ideological spectrum (Wijayanta 2004).

In another attempt at reconciliation, a meeting took place in late August 2009 at Pesantren Sabilil Muttaqien, in the village of Takeran,

[16] The new law fell short of allowing ex-political prisoners from the 1965 tragedy to run for president. Constitutional Court Chief Jimly Asshidiqie was a key figure in the University of Indonesia's proposal to scrap the XXV/MPRS/1966 Decree.

[17] We will return to Syarikat later and look at their films that revisit the troubled years.

Magetan, East Java. The meeting was sponsored by Dahlan Iskan, then the CEO of the media company Jawa Pos Group, before taking his position as State Enterprises Minister (*see* Chapter 1). The site of the meeting was one of the places where bloody conflicts in 1948 had pitted the Communists and the Islamic party of Masyumi against each other. This incident is better known as the Madiun Affair. Despite five leaders of the Pesantren Sabilil Muttaqien having been killed in the incident, one of the invited key speakers at the 2009 meeting was Soemarsono, chief of the organization's Communist military wing (Dhyatmika and Wibowo 2009). In the following week, wearing jihadi costumes, more than 100 members of the Islam Defenders Front organized a rally in front of the *Jawa Pos* headquarters in Surabaya. They burned copies of the *Jawa Pos* daily newspaper and Sumarsono's book *Revolusi Agustus* (August Revolution), and demanded that Dahlan Iskan make a public apology. What had angered the protestors was not the meeting in Magelang, but rather a series of published interviews that Dahlan had conducted with Sumarsono. In contrast to Solo Radio's submission to the mob after its broadcast of "Genjer-genjer", *Jawa Pos* rejected the demands of the protestors and invited them to write a letter of rebuke to be published in the *Jawa Pos* (Taufiq 2009).

To sum up the discussion in this section, the New Order rule (both during its reign and following its demise), is marked by a mix of dissonant views and narratives. Relations among these competing narratives have neither been static nor changed consistently in one direction or the other. Rather, they have changed and fluctuated across time and space. Anti-New Order sentiment was extremely high in the first few years following the collapse of the government. That period was later followed by a few years of a backlash of nostalgia for the economic stability and order that characterized the New Order's authoritarian regime, at a time when impact from the 1997 crisis appeared to persist and where no single political force seemed able to manage the post-New Order state (Heryanto and Hadiz 2005). Since the middle of the 2000s, there appears to have been further fragmentation of views and voices, with very little sign of moderation or consolidation in either the anti-Communist or anti-New Order positions.

New Media, Old Wound

With the rapid development of new media technology at the turn of the millenium (*see* Chapter 1), persistent difficulties in coming to terms with

the 1965 history entered a new phase. In selected areas, Indonesia has undergone significant changes since the fall of the New Order, but these changes cannot be directly or wholly attributed to the New Order's fall. The development and dissemination of media technology is one example of such changes. In fact, several observers (e.g., Garcia 2004; Hill and Sen 2005; Sen and Hill 2000) have argued the reverse: that the media—which the late New Order was complicit in helping flourish—was one of many forces that contributed in varying degrees to the regime's downfall. This section will examine some of the attempts to revisit the 1965 violence by Indonesian short film and documentary filmmakers. I will identify a few key problems encountered by Indonesian filmmakers, and the potential contributions that they may make to future projects with similar goals. With a few exceptions to be discussed below, most commercially produced feature films have avoided this controversial topic.

Against a background of broad-based developments in media technology, the national film industry made an impressive revival in the annual number of new titles produced in the early 2000s and their level of commercial success. In tandem with the development of the film and television industry, and partly as an unhappy reaction to it, young Indonesians discovered a new preoccupation in making shorts and documentary films through much of the 2000s. The term 'indie' (for independent) was widely used in the early 2000s to refer to the new trend. However, as in other places, here the term progressively lost its appeal. In part, this was due to the large diversity of works that were classified within it, ranging from the widely acclaimed *Eliana, Eliana* (2002, Riza) to works by secondary school students, which number in the thousands. The term also lost its popularity following a series of long and unresolved debates in the 2000s about what exactly the ideologically loaded term should mean. Those who were initially categorized as independent filmmakers have since been found at the forefront of the mainstream film industry, while others have moved to and fro between the mainstream film industry and underground and low-budget filmmaking. The term 'indie films' continues to be used in contemporary Indonesia, albeit less frequently and with some caution. In any case, it is wise to take the advice of Kantika van Heeren, who suggests the Indonesian use of the term should be understood within its specific historical setting and should not be synonymous with its use elsewhere (2012: 53). The term 'short and documentary films' is widely acceptable because of its largely descriptive nature, purged of the political connotations embedded in the term 'indie'.

A few features have characterized the new trend of Indonesia's short and documentary filmmaking in the early decade of the century: (a) its far-reaching popularity across much of the central to western region of the archipelagic nation, especially in big cities and small towns in Java; (b) the impressive total number of titles produced, amounting to a total of several hundred per year, although the majority of them are of poor quality;[18] (c) while a few prominent figures played a part in this new development, the demographic profile of the filmmakers indicated they were predominantly secondary school students and undergraduate university students in their late teens and mid-twenties; (d) the most common themes in these films were depictions of everyday life from the filmmakers' immediate surroundings; and (e) the almost nonexistence of sustained institutional support or organizational networks required for effective distribution, leading to serious problems in consolidating the collective efforts of these filmmakers and their activities, and hampering their collective growth.

Observers have commented that this trend was greatly facilitated by the affordability of digital gadgets for filmmaking and editing. To this I will add another factor. Living in an orality-oriented social environment, Indonesians are more susceptible to the charms of the moving image, and creatively more responsive to what the video camera offers, than to the written word or a computerized word processor. It has often been said that computers have rendered ordinary people into authors-cum-publishers or "prosumers" (producers and consumers). This is often more true in greater literacy-dependent societies than in their orality-oriented counterparts. In many oral-oriented societies, such as Indonesia, the advent of the telephone, television, and video camera and its introduction into society has generated a greater number of enthusiasts—alongside its role in producing self-taught filmmakers—than computers have had in producing authors-cum-publishers. Many people in highly literate societies may be overwhelmed by the speed at which newer models of digital gadgets supersede older ones in the marketplace. In Indonesia, the same is true for both digital gadgets and books. Most bookstores stock copies of newly released books for only a few months. The reality is of course

[18] When the SCTV network opened its first competition in 2002, more than 1,000 films were submitted, although only roughly 800 were accepted as eligible (van Heeren 2012: 58). In the years that followed, the number of contestants in the SCTV and a few other competitions stayed at around 800 plus.

much more varied and dynamic for each specific society, and their differences are far more complex than I have crudely portrayed here. In any case, what can be certain is historiography has never been one of Indonesia's strongest traditions or leading aspirations. This is exacerbated when we turn to dealing with the histories of the 1965–66 political massacres, which have left raw wounds in the nation's public life. As will be elaborated upon in the next section, a sober and critical debate of the specific histories of this event remains impossible for now and possibly for a long time to come.

Despite new media developments in Indonesia and an enlarged space for freedom of expression, only a small proportion of post-1998 films have revisited the 1965 tragedy. This should not be surprising, as the younger generation has no reason for being particularly interested in such a heavy and depressing theme. Out of approximately a thousand short and documentary films per year, only slightly over a dozen titles were specifically dedicated to revisiting this contentious historical period of the first decade of this century. The following chapter will focus on two post-New Order works of alternative filmmakers with a thematic focus on the 1965 violence or its aftermath; this chapter will not examine several other sets of creative works that are otherwise related or relevant to our concerns here. Excluded in this discussion are films where the setting of 1965 remains only in the background, such as *The Years of Living Dangerously* (1983, Weir) and *Gie* (name of a legendary activist) (2005, Riza), which I have discussed elsewhere (Heryanto 2008a). I will also exclude a discussion of those foreign documentary films that focus on the 1965 political turmoil and its aftermath, such as *The Shadow Play* (2001, Hilton), *Terlena: Breaking of a nation* (2004, Vltchek), *40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy* (2009, Lemelson), and *The Women And The Generals* (2009, Wechselmann). I will make two exceptions and provide my rationale: the commercial feature *Sang Penari* (*The Dancer*) (2011, Isfansyah) (*see* later) and internationally-produced documentary film *The Act of Killing* (2012, Oppenheimer) (*see* the next chapter).[19]

[19] Our current discussion might resonate or intersect with analyses of films that address issues of political violence in other societies or in Indonesia from other periods, as well as analysis of a wide variety of creative works that address the 1965–66 issues in different media (visual arts, dance, theatre or literature) and genres of screen culture (video arts and animation). The latter questions are simply too broad and complex to be incorporated into the current study.

Nearly all the 1965-focused films under this study were produced by older people who had greater technical skills and political commitment than the average practitioner in the field. Unfortunately, both individually and collectively, these films have had very limited impact on the public; certainly too limited an impact to challenge the New Order propaganda on the issue of 1965.[20] The small number of these films and their limited impact can be easily appreciated in light of the enormous and multi-layered number of difficulties encountered by anyone producing anything of substance on this sensitive issue. Apart from political censure, any film revisiting the 1965 violence content-wise must confront a set of dilemmas that arise from the complexity of the subject matter and the unpreparedness of many of the Indonesian audience for dealing with it. The next section will offer a general survey of the individual films in question, illustrating some of these difficulties as they come to be expressed. For the purpose of analyzing the 1965-focused films to date, and assessing their political significance, two important factors will be considered. Firstly, I will identify the dilemmas confronting the filmmaker, which constitute a set of narrative options and constraints in dealing with such a sensitive topic in the current situation in Indonesia. Secondly, I will distinguish three categories pertinent to each of the filmmakers' backgrounds and positions as they relate to the sensitive issue in focus, and as they effect the potential strengths and limitations of their achievements.

Any narration—in film or other medium—of the complex and highly contentious issue of the 1965 violence for an Indonesian audience in the 2000s will be confounded by the fundamental problem of having to draw a narrow focus around particular fragments, and privilege particular perspectives with political significance at the expense of others.

[20] I acknowledge this assessment is open to debate. In conversation with me during my fieldwork (2009–12) several of the filmmakers whose works are discussed here, as well as their supporters, expressed separately a sense of satisfaction of the extent to which their work have been received. Apparently, there exists a significant difference of expectations. They expected much less than I do. It is also possible that these films will gradually have a greater impact in the longer term, and what we have witnessed thus far is a slow and tiny beginning. I based my assessment on the information available to me during the period of my research, which points to the prevalence of the New Order's anti-Communist propaganda, as portrayed in the previous section, and will be further discussed as a more specific case within the concluding section of this chapter.

Succinctly, narrators would most likely face at least one of the following three sets of dilemmas. First, there is the dilemma of needing to provide an adequate and persuasive historical context for the 1965 events (in itself a highly contentious area) versus the need to present a central message in a manner that is comfortable to and conducive to engaging with a divided contemporary audience. This is extremely daunting as the majority of an Indonesian audience has very little knowledge of or interest in the issue, while others bring to the viewing an excessive number of preconceptions and expectations that are unrealistically high. Secondly, the filmmaker faces a dilemma over the need to address the question of what really took place amongst the political elite in Jakarta in September–October 1965—which provides a setting for the series of actions that take place over the ensuing months—and the need to address the brutal killings that raged in various regions located far from the capital city, and involved commoners who had no knowledge or interest in the political struggles over state power among the elites. The third inevitable dilemma—and one that potentially poses more logistical and narrative problems for filmmakers or stage performers than for narrators in other media—concerns the tension between the need to show the somewhat 'abstract' global and structural context (the Cold War) that shaped the conditions for the series of events in 1965, and the 'concrete' lived experience of individuals' immediate social environment and their relationships in a given time and space.

Each of these elements is equally important in any story about the 1965 violence and its aftermath. Yet, no act of narration—with its limited scope, frame, and select focus—can possibly include all of these elements in equal proportion. Even under the most ideal and liberal circumstances, narrators of the topic (filmmakers included) must choose to focus on certain selected aspects and leave other issues unaddressed, sidelined, or in the background, thus risking problems of effective communication with the audience.

Significantly, the filmmakers' backgrounds have each marked their work with their own signature style. They can be divided into three categories, with some degree of overlap and oscillations between cases from one category to the other. The first category consists of those who self-identify, or are identified by others, primarily as former political prisoners of the New Order, and their immediate circles. The second group is activists from various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), particularly those with a special interest in human rights issues. The third consists of individuals who have become or aspire to becoming full-time

filmmakers: their interests are in filmmaking over and above other political or social issues.

Challenges and Achievements[21]

The Institute of Creative Humanity (Lembaga Kreatifitas Kemanusiaan, LKK), represents the first type of producer. Under the leadership of poet-cum-novelist Putu Oka Sukanta, the Institute is the single largest producer of documentary films focusing on the aftermath of the 1965 violence. Like Sukanta, those behind the work of the Institute are ex-political prisoners (or their relatives) who were imprisoned as a result of their active membership in LEKRA, an affiliate of the PKI.[22] In personal communication with me in 2010, Putu mentioned that some people have described the work of LKK as a new LEKRA. At the time of writing, six documentaries focusing on the victims of the 1965 event have been produced by the Institute. They are (in chronological order): *Menyemai Terang Dalam Kelam* (*Sowing Light within the Darkness*) (2006, Wiranegara), *Perempuan Yang Tertuduh* (*The Accused Women*) (2007, Munafidah), *Tumbuh Dalam Badai* (*Growing in the Storm*) (2007, Wiranegara), *Seni Ditating Jaman* (*Art That Will Not Die*) (2008, Wiranegara), *Tjidurian 19* (the name of the street location of the LEKRA office in Jakarta) (2009, Aziz and Susatyo), and *Plantungan* (name of a village and prison in the mid-1960s) (2011, Siwirini). The first two films look at the broader political issues of 1965 and the aftermath. Subsequent films in the series gradually narrow their focus to the experience of LEKRA artists and their immediate associates, before returning to the female victims again in *Plantungan*. A more in-depth discussion of *Tjidurian 19* will be provided in the next chapter.

The LKK played a pioneering role in giving a voice to those who suffered as political prisoners from 1965. One consistent feature of these films is a large proportion of talking heads, most of whom are

[21] Some of the data and arguments in this section have previously appeared in an older and different version in Heryanto (2012b).

[22] Although LKK can be considered an NGO, it is a special kind of NGO. Most members of an NGO can join or leave any time, subject to administrative procedure, while retaining membership they can usually claim an equal status in principle. In contrast, the founding and still current leading members of LKK are distinguished by their involuntary status as political victims of serious crime perpetrated under the New Order.

1965 ex-political prisoners and their immediate family members, plus a few historians and experts who are strongly sympathetic to the plight of these victims. One exception is *Seni Ditating Jaman*, which contains an interview with poet Leon Agusta, whose political position stands in opposition to that of LEKRA's. It is apparent from the viewing that presentation is not a major concern for most of these films, especially the earlier ones. Apparently, budget constraints have been a major factor in contributing to this shortcoming. As the technical and aesthetic aspects of presentation gained progressively more attention in the later films, the political content is notably toned down. Undoubtedly, these films are regarded with a special consideration because of the value attached to the authentic testimonies of the victims and eyewitness' accounts of the 1965 events. However, they are limited in their capacity to appeal to a more general audience in contemporary Indonesian because of the subject matter and the staid delivery. Most of the talking heads are frail-looking people in their late 60s or older. While they speak in plain Indonesian about their personal and concrete experiences, the topics are unfamiliar to most Indonesians. Moreover, these narrators are not well equipped with the necessary rhetorical devices that enable them to address the concerns of those outside their immediate circles.

The second category of filmmakers focusing on the issue of 1965 or its aftermath, are NGOs with a special commitment to human rights issues. At the time of writing, I managed to access five films. The earliest one under this category is *Bunga-tembok* (*Wallflower*) (2003, Wiludiharto) produced by the Jakarta-based Institute for Study and Advocacy of Community (Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat, Elsham). This film covers human rights violations by the New Order from 1965 to 1998, rather than an exclusive focus on the 1965 massacre. It contains many interviews with victims and their families, and several scenes depicting political activists working towards the establishment of an association for victims of New Order political violence, with the aim of seeking justice for its victims. Elsham also co-sponsored (with Pakorba, Solo) another documentary film, *Jembatan Bacem* (*Bacem Bridge*) (2013, Wiludiharto), featuring victims and individuals who were coerced into assisting the killings in 1965 around the city of Solo, Central Java. Another documentary *Kawan Tiba Senja: Bali Seputar 1965* (*Friends Arriving at Dusk: Bali around 1965*) (2004, Wimba), is the product of a collaboration between the Institute for the Investigation of Victims of the 1965 Event-Bali (Lembaga Penelitian Korban Peristiwa 65-Bali) and Jepun Klopak

Enam. As the title suggests, the film focuses on the testimony of 1965 victims from the island of Bali, where a large proportion of killings took place, and is interspersed with interviews with experts. What distinguishes this film from most of the others mentioned earlier is the generous scope it provides for analytical discussion, featuring as it does a number of interviews with academics.

Of special interest are two documentaries devoted to female victims of the 1965 violence. The first is *Kado Untuk Ibu* (*A Gift for Mother*) (2004, Setiadi), and the second is *Putih Abu-Abu: Masa Lalu Perempuan* (*Grey White: Women's Past*) (2006, Primonik, Kumalawati, Yanuar, and Ramadhan). Like most works previously discussed, a large portion of the narrative in these two films present talking heads—women who were detained in Plantungan prison (Kendal, Central Java) as a result their marriage to a Communist party member or their membership of GERWANI, an affiliate organization of the PKI. The same prison and its former prisoners have also become the focus of a newer documentary entitled *Plantungan*, also produced by LKK in 2011 (see above). The women appearing in this film and similar documentaries are bold. They display passionate rhetorical skills as they retell their ordeal, which includes their sexual assault by military interrogators. Despite the qualities of the personalities featured and their engaging stories, it is hard to imagine the film impressing anyone other than human rights activists or the immediate circle of those personally affected by the anti-Communist campaign.

Putih Abu-Abu: Masa Lalu Perempuan is more impressive in content and is of a higher production value. It is a compilation of six short documentary films, all produced by secondary school students (aged 15–17 years) from Bandung and Yogyakarta, following their participation in a filmmaking workshop hosted by Syarikat Indonesia and the National Commission for Anti-Violence Against Women (Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan) in August 2006. In some of the films, fellow schoolmates as well as schoolteachers are interviewed about their views and understanding of the history of 1965. As suggested earlier, in the mid-2000s a large number of Indonesian youth discovered the pleasure and affordability of amateur filmmaking with simple gadgets. Filmmaking workshops for school students were common. *Putih Abu-Abu: Masa Lalu Perempuan* is notable for pioneering this, counter to the general lack of interest among contemporary youth in the sensitive topic of 1965 violence. The name of the two films' co-producer Syarikat

is an abbreviation for Masyarakat Santri untuk Advokasi Rakyat (Pious Muslim Community for People's Advocacy).[23] This Yogyakarta-based NGO was founded by activists from Indonesia's largest Muslim Organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, which was considerably complicit in the killings of the Communists in 1965–66.[24] It represents one of the first and most exceptional initiatives among nationwide Muslim communities who bear culpability for the 1965–66 killings to build reconciliation with the victims and their families. Against all the odds, Syarikat remains the largest institutionalized and most radical of these initiatives in what is a long overdue endeavor.[25]

Syarikat also produced another short fictive film *Sinengker: Sesuatu Yang Dirahasiakan* (*Sinengker: Something Kept Secret*) (2007, Aprisiyanto), critically addressing the injustice done to the victims of 1965 in a poetic fashion. Although there are some problems with the logic of the storyline in the second half of the film, its overall visual presentation is a fresh change to the usual monotonous talking heads in previously mentioned documentaries. Its filmmakers demonstrate commitment and a level of skill with respect to the aesthetic aspects of photography. This point forms a good transition for our discussion of the 1965-themed films by the more dedicated filmmakers. However, before we pursue this direction, it is worth pausing for a moment and returning to the earlier points I made about the three dilemmas in narrating the 1965 events.

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[23] It is worth mentioning that the word *serikat* in today's Indonesian means 'union' as in labor union, with its leftist political tinge, which the New Order government has stigmatized and declared illegal. Instead of adopting the current spelling '*serikat*', however, the Yogyakarta NGO calls itself Syarikat, an older spelling for '*serikat*', which is reminiscent of Syarikat Islam (Islam Union) and Syarikat Dagang Islamiah (Islamic Trade Union), two of the earliest modern and trans-ethnic organizations of the colonized Dutch East Indies in the first decade of the twentieth century.

[24] A special issue of the newsmagazine *TEMPO* (1–7 Oct. 2012) carries a long series of reports and interviews with selected killers of the suspected Communists in 1965–66, many of whom had some affiliation with this Muslim organization. Nearly all spoke openly about their acts with no sense of remorse.

[25] In an interview with Chloe Olliver, Imam Aziz (the Program Coordinator of Syarikat) explained the primary activities and aims of this organization: "Syarikat has been investigating the massacres and other human rights violations of 1966 in order to start the reconciliation process. This process mostly involves NU, given that it was NU youth who perpetrated much of the violence" (Olliver 2004). For a broader context of the matter, *see* Fealy and McGregor (2010).

Generally speaking, the LKK films focus on the historical context at the expense of other issues that would have greater appeal for a younger audience today. Although some of the global context that precipitated the conditions for the 1965 tragedy is provided in some of their films, typically the focus is on the violence that raged in many parts of Java and Bali—with little disclosure about what happened among the top political elite in 1965 and on the personal plights of the individuals. As can be expected, one central thread running through the LKK films is a narrative of victimhood, presented in the authentic voice of the victims themselves. These films would undoubtedly appeal more to scholars and those investigating the violent history than to the general public, particularly those in their twenties and younger. The 1965-focussed films produced by NGOs differ only slightly from those produced by LKK; their similarities abound in the similar spirit of advocacy, and the appearance of some of the same victims as talking heads who appear in both sets of films in medium and close up shots, narrating the same or similar testimonies. However, with the exceptions of those titles produced by Syarikat, many of the NGO films lack a range of authentic voices, the historical background information, and the broader context as presented in the LKK films, and demonstrate only a basic level of technical competence. In terms of the three dilemmas, the NGO films perform only slightly better than their LKK counterparts in rhetorically engaging with a contemporary young audience. However, LKK has been far more vigorous and successful in promoting their films to reach out to a wider audience than have the NGOs, for whom advocacy via film is probably only one small and marginal item on a long list of other work in their programs. Unlike the works of LKK, films by NGOs (again with the exceptions of those produced by Syarikat) have barely been known or mentioned in any of the media coverage or in the many conversations I have had with many people in the field during my research work, including those within NGO circles.

The third and final category of filmmakers who have produced a few works focusing on the 1965 massacre are those whose main interest is in film as an artform. The three titles that are available to me for analysis vary widely in terms of their running time, genre and style. What they all share—in contrast to the films discussed above—is their serious attention to the basic techniques of filmmaking, relative to other aspects of the output, as well as the resources used to produce that output. In confronting the three dilemmas of narrating the 1965 events,

the films in this last category pay maximum attention to communicating effectively and artistically with a general audience, including those who have no special interest in the history of 1965. These qualities are sometimes achieved at the expense of the background information, which is requisite for a fuller appreciation of the story's significance for Indonesian history. Focusing more on the impact and aftermath of the national tragedy, and framing the storyline as a human drama about ordinary citizens, these more artistic films demonstrate that they are less interested in the power struggle among the top political elite in Jakarta, which precipitated the mass killings, or the international context for the massacre.

Puisi Tak Terkuburkan (*Poetry That Cannot Be Buried*) (1999, Nugraha) was the first post-New Order Indonesian film to revisit the events surrounding the 1965 killings. Garin Nugraha has unrivalled fame and authority among his peers in this field. Unsurprisingly, this is the best-known film of this genre for the first decade of the twentieth century.[26] The film focuses on the verbal recollection of Ibrahim Kadir, a singer of *didong*, an Acehnese poetry form, who was mistakenly imprisoned in 1965. Ibrahim, who plays himself in the film, provides testimony as a witness to his own situation in his cell and as a forced participant charged with preparing for the execution of his fellow inmates. Cinematographically, *Puisi Tak Terkuburkan* is undoubtedly one of the best Indonesian films to focus on the 1965 theme. The dramatic suspense and pathos are intense for a large portion of this gloomy black-and-white film, with most shots confined to the area of two adjacent prison cells. However, the situation of these prisoners appears much less dire when compared to the reported plight of similar victims in Java and Bali, both on- and off-screen. By no means do I wish to suggest that this is a flaw of the film, or an inaccuracy. The film is not meant to be a historical representation of reality, although references to real historical facts appear in the opening and closing scenes. Rutherford suggests "Nugroho emphasises his choice to avoid the historical approach (*sejarah*), and to work with the emotional registers of 'the verbal tradition'" (2006: 3).

Two things from *Puisi Tak Terkuburkan* stand out for anyone familiar with how comparable situations in Java and Bali are depicted in scholarly works or other documentaries. Firstly, Ibrahim Kadir was

[26] For a sample of a highly complimentary analysis of the film, *see* Rutherford (2006).

released after 22 days when officials confirmed his innocence. Both erroneous detentions and the deliberate detentions of the non-target population during the 1965 witch-hunt were common features in Java. To the best of my knowledge, most of the innocent people held by error in Java were not released until after they endured many years of exile, torture, and imprisonment without trial. Secondly, oddly, in *Puisi Tak Terkuburkan* there is only one prison guard on duty for the many political prisoners, and he is extremely weak in character. Towards the end of the film, the prison guard appears helpless when a female prisoner boldly challenges the state-sponsored violence in the region and, more specifically, criticizes how executions are conducted in this particular prison. This kind of scene is unique (in film or other medium) from this troubling period in other areas of Indonesia that I have studied.

In contrast, a graphic presentation of violence by the state security apparatus against a meek citizen is the focus of *Djedjak Darah: Surat Teruntuk Adinda* (*Bloody Footsteps: Letter to the Beloved*) (2004, Aprisiyanto). Markus Aprisiyanto and his crew belonged to a small Yogyakarta-based network of young filmmakers called Déjà Vu Production. In 2004 it won two awards: the Second Saraswati Award at the Bali International Film Festival and the prestigious Citra award at the Indonesian Film Festival. Comparing it with Syarikat's *Kado Untuk Ibu* discussed earlier, Barbara Hatley describes the film as

> a more ambitious work, incorporating fragments of music and sung poetry, filmic effects such as flashbacks, and subtitles in English, in representing the fictional experience of a young *ketoprak* performer, seized from his home as a suspected Communist sympathizer and brutally dragged away for 'interrogation'.
>
> (2006: 6)

The significance of the closing scene is not lost in Hatley's analysis:

> The violence with which he is treated by his captors, using graphic slow motion shots, and the trail of blood left behind evoke strong parallels with the scenes depicting the kidnapping of the generals by the Communists in the film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September/PKI*.
>
> (2006: 6)

In the final shot, the filmmakers provide their signature image for the audience in the form of a close-up of a pool of the protagonist's blood on the floor and the imprint in blood of an army boot (hence the title

of the film). In an in-depth study of Indonesian independent or alternative films, Katinka van Heeren has expressed her disquiet with the fact that post-New Order alternative films reproduce the cinematic structure and some of the visual aspects of the New Order propaganda films and ceremonies, but with the reverse hero/villain figures (van Heeren 2012: 109–15). Her meticulous examination is admirable, but I find her assessment in this regard open to debate.[27] I share Hatley's view that precisely replicating the New Order framework but turning it upside down or inside out is one of several ways to radically confront and subvert the New Order propaganda. In the case of *Djedjak Darah: Surat Teruntuk Adinda*'s closing scene, by replicating the frames in similar scenes from *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* (depicting the blood on the floor where six generals were shot in their homes) and reversing the message, the post-New Order filmmaker directly "writes back to the ideological constructs of New Order media" (Hatley 2006: 7).

Likewise, the plight of the innocent victims of the 1965–66 political turmoil, was foregrounded in *Sang Penari* (*The Dancer*) (2011, Isfansyah), the newer commercially-produced feature film just released when this chapter was prepared, based on Ahmad Tohari's triology *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruh* (*Ronggeng Dancer from Village Paruh*) (2003). The film's opening scene is of political detainees crammed in a dark room—a premonition, which returns in a later part of the film. In the novel, such a scene does not occur until very late in the storyline. I mention *Sang Penari* with some hesitancy. As it was commercially produced for mainstream distribution, it does not fall easily within the scope of our current discussion as outlined above. The 1965–66 history does not take center stage in this film. Rather, like *Gie* (2005, Riza), it serves as the background for the main storyline. In *Sang Penari*, the main storyline is framed around romantic relations between two heterosexual protagonists in a style reminiscent of Hollywood, and not very different to that of *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983, Weir). What distinguishes *Sang Penari* from these two other films, thus making it rather exceptional, are two things. First, the protagonists in *Sang Penari* are being directly implicated in the 1965–66 political turmoil (instead of being observers or bystanders as in the other two films). Secondly, the film is strongly sympathetic towards the victims of the 1965–66 massacres. In this sense,

[27] One of the two films she examines as a basis for her argument is *Mass Grave*, the film I will discuss next. In contrast to her critical assessment of the film, I find this documentary one of the best of all the films discussed in this chapter.

this is a domestically produced commercial film that poses the most politically critical stance to the official ideology so far.[28] Srintil, the female protagonist in *Sang Penari*, was one of many political detainees in early 1966. Rasus, the male protagonist, Srintil's lover, is a low-ranking army officer whose job was officially to assist the anti-Communist witch-hunt.

Unfortunately, *Sang Penari* does not take the next step of challenging or transcending the New Order's overall ideological framework, which has already been established by the master narrative of *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. With a few exceptions (mainly authored by survivors of the anti-Communist campaign from 1965), left-leaning characters in all Indonesian fiction set against the background of the 1965–66 massacre appear either as wicked villains, smart but malicious persons who mislead other people, innocent but hopelessly foolish individuals who are susceptible to Communist propaganda, or unlucky for being related to Communists by descent or marriage. Invariably, these fictions convey a familiar message to their implied audience: it is the characters' own fault if they are killed off. *Sang Penari* makes no exception to this general practice.

The last film from the third category I wish to mention is Lexy Rambadeta's *Mass Grave* (2002). I find this brief documentary outstanding among the locally produced non-commercial films already discussed in this section, in terms of both the technical quality of production and the force of its political message. Produced in 2000–01 and released in 2002, it was one of the first documentary films to focus on the sensitive topic. Despite its extremely low budget,[29] the work is one of the few films that achieve the highest standards among the thousands of post-New Order shorts and documentary works. What distinguishes this film from other documentaries discussed earlier is its content, namely the live recording of two events directly relevant to the topic rather than the narrative recollections of eye-witnesses as talking heads. The first of

[28] *Sang Penari* won four awards at the 2011 Indonesian Film Festival, including those for the Best Film, Best Director, Best Leading Actress, and Best Supporting Actress. Hikmat Darmawan, who chaired the selection committee for the year, acknowledges that one of the primary considerations among members of the committee for championing the film was its "attempts to reverse the official history of the birth of the New Order" regime (Darmawan 2012b). In a separate essay, reviewing Indonesian films produced in 2011, film critic Eric Sasono (2012) applauds the bold move by the filmmaker to directly implicate the national army in the 1965 killings, although an army soldier is presented as a most charming lead character.

[29] According to Lexy, it cost him IDR 4 million (roughly USD 400), which came out of his own pocket (pers. comm., 2010).

the two events is the exhumation of mass graves of the 1965 victims. The second is the communal reaction from local people—with some physical assaults and threats of further killings—to the intention of the families of the deceased to bury the skeletons. Having these materials, and having mastered the skills of filmmaking, Lexy also inserted highly selective archival clips from various sources, both domestic and foreign. In place of the usual talking heads, these clips appear on the screen as testimonies and commentaries running throughout the film. The outcome is a powerful message aided by rich materials in terms of sound, image, and action.

Lexy's *Mass Grave* also outdoes its contemporaries for two additional reasons. First, it achieves a good balance in terms of the three dilemmas outlined above, between (a) background information relating to the past and the political confrontations of the present that should resonate with a poorly informed audience, (b) the top political elite's struggle for state power in Jakarta and the massacres in various regions, and (c) information about the global context (the Cold War) and recollections of individual victims of 1965. Secondly, the documentary is unique for having included a substantial number of original shots of anti-Communist forces and their voices (including a scene of perpetrators carrying a machete and threatening a victim of the 1965 murders). Unlike the top military officers who reaped the benefits of the 1965 violence and its aftermath, here the local militias can in fact also be considered victims in the national tragedy, as much as the families of the political prisoners they attacked. Such confrontational images are missing from most of the documentaries produced in the subsequent years, rendering most of these films repetitively monological. We shall discuss the issue further in the next chapter.

Burden of History

Taken together, the films discussed above represent a strong desire in post-New Order Indonesia to revisit the painful history of 1965, and to explore alternative narratives to the official propaganda. Indonesian artists have produced a wide variety of works along these lines, both before and after the fall of the New Order.[30] Some of these works use the bloody

[30] Although these works deserve greater attention and more serious analysis, it is currently beyond the scope of the present chapter. For earlier analyses of some of these works, *see* Bodden (2010) for theatre, Foulcher (1990a) for literature, and Turner (2007) for fine arts.

history of 1965 as a setting or background, while others only make passing references to the killings. Short film and documentary filmmaking in Indonesia was a new trend in the early years of this century.

Many of these filmmakers have been beset by a wide variety of problems connected to lack of resources, management, networking and distribution. As some of the filmmakers have remarked, making a film is easy but screening it before a broad audience never is. Beyond the extensive popularity of shorts and documentary filmmaking in Indonesia, and beyond the internal divisions of a restless film industry, there is no sign of any major production house having the interest and capacity to produce a full feature film and the willingness to confront the nation with the long-overdue challenge of coming to terms with the historical facts and moral complexities of 1965 events.

The case of the aborted production of *Lastri* vividly illuminates why such a task is far from easy. The film was to be directed by the acclaimed film director Eros Djarot. When the crew was about to begin shooting in the village of Colomadu, Karanganyar, Central Java in November 2008, the Islam Defenders Front and Hizbullah Bulan Bintang (Moon and Crescent Party of God) protested, alleging that the film would "spread communism". Although no violence was reported, Khoirul Rus Suparjo, head of the Islam Defenders Front, declared that forced cancellation was imminent. A week later, more social groups joined the protest. According to the director, the film was meant to be a melodramatic romance between two young lovers set amidst the trouble of 1965. The Indonesian Police Headquarters had issued a permit for the film's production, and the Colomandu Sugar factory had granted permission to film on their site. Shooting had initially been scheduled to take place in Klaten, a neighboring town, but was cancelled due to similar threats. The Association of Independent Journalists (AJI), as well as editors of the nation's major newspapers condemned the incident. A counter rally took to the streets to show support for the production of *Lastri* but the filmmakers decided not to proceed.

Like many other nations, Indonesia has a troubled and violent past so overwhelming that the majority of its population continues to feel protracted repercussions on a daily basis. In some countries, the medium of film has emerged as a key platform where the nation learns to come to terms with its past in a collective fashion. Indonesia is one of the least prepared nations to do so, despite having a long and rich history of cinema (*see* Chapter 6). As the analysis of films on the 1965–66 massacres above indicates, Indonesians remain unable to resolve, ignore or

forget the multiple issues related to its violent past. Denials and repression of the issues have been the standard strategy for the majority of institutions and individuals. This has been responsible, at least in part, for not only the general tendency to view the rise of Islamization in an ahistorical fashion, as indicated in the opening section of this chapter, but also for the failure to recognize and control the legacies of past violence and impunity that has spilled into contemporary politics. Unsurprisingly, we witness ordinary Indonesians reacting with consistent bewilderment, dumbfoundness and paralysis when confronted by the cycle of communal conflicts and fatalities over the past half a century.

CHAPTER 5

The Impossibility of History?

Moral imperatives often lead analysts to hold the conviction, either naively or by intent, that truth and justice must ultimately be made available to human rights victims. Hence the optimistic urge for playing a role, no matter how small, in the commendable struggle to attain these goals sooner rather than later. The trouble is many of us do not have the ability, courage, or willingness to consider a less ideal scenario, which could be misconstrued as implying a compromise or worse, a concession to injustice. Even a cursory review of the literature in Indonesia under the New Order would demonstrate the commonly held assumption of many analysts that state repression must necessarily generate either full acquiescence or resentment—even if this resentment remains mute among the general population. Conversely, the removal of such top-down repression will enable the release of voices and previously repressed emotions into the open. Such an optimistic view was strong in the discourse of "transition to democracy" worldwide from the 1960s, which survives well into this century. Pertinent to this chapter, such sentiment is implicit in the title of an otherwise admirable documentary film that examines the trauma of four victims of the 1965 violence: *40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy* (2009, Lemelson). However, even at the height of the New Order's authoritarian rule, one could find audacious dissenting voices from within the population, as well as significant gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions on the part of the state apparatuses (Heryanto 2006a). As suggested in the previous chapter, and has already been theorized eloquently by others,[1] there is no easy linear progression towards

[1] Raymond Williams noted: "if our social and political and cultural ideas and assumptions and habits were merely the result of specific manipulation … then the society would be very much easier to move and to change than in practice it has ever been or is" (1980: 37). *See also* comments from Cohen and Rogers (1991: 17) on paradoxical combination of extreme media servility and minimal state control of those media in the US.

self-expression or resolute demand for justice that is in direct correlation with an expanding formal democracy, or enlarged freedom of speech.

Despite a title that could be misconstrued to imply a similar hopeful conviction, Mary Zurbuchen's *Beginning to Remember: The Past in The Indonesian Present* presents important insights with reference to the 1965 political violence, precisely for problematizing such hope. In her introductory chapter, she demonstrates persuasively how difficult, complex, and risky the attempt to remember the violent past can be in the present (Zurbuchen 2005).[2] It is not a matter of time (i.e., the familiar notion that healing takes time and that with the passage of time things will necessarily be easier or better), as Zurbuchen briefly contemplates (2005: 13–4). Instead, as she perceptively notes elsewhere in the same chapter, she states those "who have survived traumatic experiences may be unable or unwilling to express themselves" (Zurbuchen 2005: 7), even within the ideal circumstances of liberalism. One might add also the possibility that human rights victims and their families may prefer not to obtain assistance to help them articulate their memory and grievances, or indeed any representation to speak of their sufferings on their behalf. Some of the 1965 victims chose to maintain 40 years of silence; for other fellow victims, 4 years was enough. Still other victims may opt for total silence for life. The situation is complicated further by the limited capacity of language and memory to express the experience. Citing Edith Wyschogord, Zurbuchen considers the "impossibility of recovering or representing the past completely" and asks "[w]hat are the responsibilities of researching or bringing forward questions of the past, such as mass killing, if we can never really be certain of knowing what actually happened?" (2005: 6).

History is impossible—if by "history" we mean the full understanding of events as they "really happened". Citing Walter Benjamin, Sarah Lincoln notes that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it as 'the way it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory". It ultimately implies "construct[ing] a fiction of a coherent history out of the fragmentary narratives" (2008: 40). Adrian Vickers also suggests the impossibility of history, with specific reference to public debate on the history of 1965 and a few other related topics in present-day Indonesia (2009).[3] The reason, according to Vickers, is that Indonesians

[2] For a more general discussion on the subject, *see* Kaplan and Wang (2008b).

[3] I am grateful to Adrian for sharing his paper and for granting me permission to cite his work in progress.

are either unwilling or unable to have an "interchange between positions" where each party "is really listening to the other" in a sober manner. What he has observed in Indonesia is the general practice of contestation where "statements are not made to persuade through logic and evidence, but to affirm absolute 'truths' that are already known. Persuasion comes from actually making a statement, from its form rather than detailed content" (2009: 7). This leads Vickers to question the merits of the various scholarly works on "history" and "memory" for the relevant analysis of cases in Indonesia. Vickers' misgivings are an excellent starting point for further enquiry, and can be explored in greater depth outside this book. However, I beg to differ from Vickers when he makes his next argument: that the general inability or unwillingness to have a rational debate is an effect of the "persuasive power" of "the continued workings New Order rhetoric" (2009: 9). I wish to propose two alternative arguments on this point.

First, as I have elaborated elsewhere (Heryanto 2006a), underpinning the strength of any long-running domination in most cases is physical violence and material destruction on a large scale, along with the sustained threat of its potential reoccurrence. In the case of Indonesia, the basis of such power was the mass killings in 1965–66 combined with subsequent decades of periodic state-sponsored violence, a continuing state terror campaign, which operated with impunity, and reiterating threats of the potential return of the Communists. These factors provided the conditions for exercises of excessive power from 1966 onwards, in a range of other forms, including rhetoric. Whatever powers of rhetoric the New Order might have commanded (as alluded to by Vickers), that magic rhetoric did not simply acquire its efficacy from the efforts of some clever New Order official or institution that invented and manipulated it. Rhetoric never occupies an autonomous space in history or in a world of free floating signs. As Bourdieu and Passeron contend, "every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations" (1977: 4). By no means does this view suggest that the 1965 violence was the sole origin and cause of all that came afterwards. In turn, the 1965 violence can be viewed as an effect of something larger and older than the Cold War, and something local and specific in the history of these people. What immediately concerns us here is the importance of recognizing the protracted and prevailing deep fear and raw wound in the social fabric of the collective, making it impossible, undesirable, and

even seriously risky for any member of that collective to discuss the 1965–66 killings even purely at an intellectual level, in any sober manner "through logic and evidence", with the aim of learning some truth about that past. The totalizing language of "us versus them" and the binary fatalist logic of "kill or be killed" prevails and takes effect, insidiously akin to a situation of war.

Second, Vickers seems to have given the New Order more credit than is warranted. I would contend that the New Order regime was no less subject to the "absolutist logic" than its dissenters who adopted the same logic and rhetoric to attack the regime. This logic predated the New Order; furthermore, the logic is not unique to Indonesia. Most, perhaps all, societies have at several periods been unwilling or unable to have an "interchange between positions" where each party "is really listening to the other" in a sober manner about selected parts of their histories. In Indonesia, this logic is responsible for the growth of a massive sense of identity politics with a sense of "fatally belonging" (Heryanto 2006a: 24–32), which severely divided the nation, without necessarily the instigation of the state apparatuses. The actual entity to which that fatal belongingness is devoted or embedded, varies across time and space: nationhood in one moment, one's religion and God in another, or ethnicity and even one's sports fan club in others. While many aspects of the widespread sense of fatal belongingness remain in question for me, it is my preliminary understanding that the situation has been further complicated by a mode of living where oral communication is predominant, as distinct from the level of nominal literacy. "This is a world where signs and the world they represent were believed to be inseparable" (Heryanto 2006a: 32).

Modern schooling in Indonesia, especially since the militarist regime of New Order came to power, has obviously done little or nothing to neutralize, moderate, or undermine the 'absolutist logic' and 'fatally belonging' disposition of many youth. In fact, schooling may have aggravated the situation. The charms of digital technology has slightly altered the situation and captured the imaginations of the millions of Indonesian youths. Unfortunately, as the previous chapter shows, new technological developments have not helped much to prepare them or their elders for dealing with the contentious history of the 1965 violence in any significant way. A global phenomenon, affordable and user-friendly digital gadgets have not empowered youth to do what their elders have been doing with greater speed, accuracy or ease. Rather, the new media have given young people new identities, doing new things in a new world.

The technology provides them with the pleasure of accessing at an unprecedented speed, scale, ease platforms on which they can record, edit, comment on and share their day-to-day life experience globally, anywhere and anytime. This is a world of Facebooking and Twittering, where everyday utterances, sighs and activities enter a hall of mirrors on a global scale in real time.

Hence the paradox: as Indonesian youth networks expand globally with the single push of a button, their day-to-day perspectives shrink to the size of their personal Facebook page or the screen of their smartphones. Technically, smartphones and Facebook have the capacity to store, edit, convert and transmit a lengthy and deeply contemplated thoughts, which can be carefully crafted over many drafts and revisions. But the technology has not been designed for that purpose. It is no accident that the working of this technology in everyday life fosters addictive-like behavior in its users, compelling an indiscriminate preoccupation with the opposite: incessant but short, disconnected, and hasty exchanges of code for brief fragmented moments of consciousness. These features significantly resonate with those of orality-oriented communication. If such banal observations provide a clue to the broader social and psychological phenomena, it should come as no surprise that meticulous historiography has never occupied a privileged position in Indonesian society. This observation is further attested to by dominant formats and themes that appear in the majority of shorts and documentary films in contemporary Indonesia as discussed in the previous chapter.

The next two sections will present two fascinating attempts to bring the aftermath of the 1965 killings to the big screen. The next section is based on my observation of a public screening of a documentary entitled *Tjidurian 19* (2009, Aziz and Susatyo), co-directed by two young filmmakers who were born and raised under the New Order. The subsequent section is based on a viewing and a series of conversations with the director of a documentary entitled *The Act of Killing* (2012), which I viewed privately with the filmmakers prior to its premiere. This documentary features horrific and surrealistic testimonies from the killers of suspected Communists in North Sumatra in 1965. In very different ways, both films help us tease out the notion of the impossibility, or near impossibility, of a "history" of 1965. They add to more insightful narratives, which help shape our intellectual and affective understanding of the aftermaths of the 1965 killings. Both documentaries raise many important questions about attempts in Indonesia to come to terms with the nation's violent past that cannot be entirely ignored, resolved, or forgotten.

History and Politics Deficit

By the time the New Order collapsed and its repressive apparatuses were weakened, one would have expected that the momentum for launching counter-narrative would be there. Indeed, for a moment, there existed a massive sigh of relief in public discussions about sensitive topics. But the fervor dissipated quickly, and not necessarily because the ghost of New Order had returned to reign again. It was no longer state censorship and terror that impeded the burst of potential counter-narratives of 1965 violence but the layers of social events and practices that increasingly rendered the events of 1965 irrelevant, or at the least a non-issue to many of those who dominated the public space. A development such as this could not have been anticipated during the New Order rule.

As time passed and more of the 1965 victims died, it became increasingly difficult for the surviving few, their descendants and their sympathizers to sustain the requisite energy and capacity to represent the 1965–66 victims in ways that would compel the attention of a nation-wide audience and maintain their interest over a considerable period of time. In the broader context, Indonesia in the first few decades of the new millennium is not simply the old Indonesia minus the authoritarian regime of the New Order. An increasing number of young people not only have little or no knowledge of that past, but can also find no reason why they should.

For a glimpse of these changing times, in this section I wish to report my observations from participating in the premiere of the documentary film *Tjidurian 19* on November 2009. I will also share my notes from a series of conversations with the film's co-directors. This film is a product of a younger generation of dedicated Indonesian filmmakers; it brings into sharp relief some of the core issues of the generation gap that separates those who had first hand experience of the 1965 and the next generation who were born and brought up on a heavy dose of New Order propaganda. The film is titled after the residential address in Jakarta where a group of LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute of Peoples' Culture) artists set up their office and workshop. LEKRA was established in 1950 and declared illegal in 1966 soon after the New Order came to power (Foulcher 1986). The New Order government imposed a blanket ban on all works by LEKRA members because they were associated with the then legal Indonesian Communist Party. Before the ban, the house at Tjidurian 19 had been the private property of Oey Hay Djoen, but had also functioned as an office and workshop base for

some of the top layer of LEKRA artists who were Jakarta-based. Soon after Oey was exiled to the penal island of Buru in 1966, his house was seized and occupied by the military. By the time the film was made, the house had already undergone a number of ownership transfers. When Oey was released from prison and returned to Jakarta, there was neither any indication that the house would be returned to him nor any form of restitution or apology. In this respect Oey's experience is typical of that of tens of thousands of the 1965 victims and their families. Many who came from less advantaged family backgrounds had undergone worse experiences, and their plights were never recorded or represented in stories or histories.

The film *Tjidurian 19* consists mainly of interviews, conducted in the late 2000s, with LEKRA artists who used to reside or spend time at Tjidurian 19, including Amrus Natalsya, Amrazan Ismail Hamid, S. Anantaguna, Hersri Setiawan, Martin Aleida, Putu Oka Sukanta, and T. Iskandar. Interviews with Oey and his wife were added. These conversational scenes are interspersed with a few historical clips of Jakarta in the 1960s. I attended the film's premiere on 17 November 2009, which was hosted by the Goethe Institut in Jakarta as part of a larger gathering that included two book launches and a literary performance, all with a common focus on the legacies of the 1965 violence. There were more than 300 people there that night, mostly young political activists and alternative filmmakers in their late 20s or early 30s. After the screening, huge applause from the audience and a question-and-answer session followed. Despite the unanimous vote of support and commendation for *Tjidurian 19*, several younger viewers commented that the film was hard to follow for those unfamiliar with the period and, more specifically, with LEKRA. For them there were too many figures appearing in the films, with too little information about who they were, what they did in the 1960s and why they did what they did.

A young couple sitting next to me looked restless throughout the entire show, and left the venue before the question-and-answer session concluded. Earlier, when the screening was halfway through, the man repeatedly made remarks to his quiet female companion next to him saying that all the film did was exonerate LEKRA artists from the stigma of the Indonesian Communist Party. I cannot remember his exact words, but I remember well being intrigued by their ambiguity. The distance between LEKRA and the PKI—and thus the autonomy and integrity that these artists enjoyed vis-à-vis any possible intervention from the PKI—was indeed one dominant message stated by many of those featured in the

film. In light of the relevant historical background, the "we are not like the PKI" statement is understandable but is not without its unintended consequences. The statement is clearly meant to be a corrective response to the three decades of indiscriminate demonization in the New Order propaganda, which caricatured all Communists and their alleged sympathizers as dogmatic, inhumane and wicked. Unfortunately, however, the defensiveness in *Tjidurian 19* is presented in ways that still resonate, albeit mildly, with the New Order propaganda about the Communists. While it successfully presents the ordinary human qualities of these LEKRA members, by stressing their distance and difference from the PKI, the unspoken and most likely unintended message is that the Communists were not as good as those LEKRA members appearing in the film. Not only does the New Order's crime in 1965–66 go uncriticized, the regime's allegations about the savagery of the Communists are also left unchallenged, if not mildly reaffirmed.

To return to the comments made by the young man sitting next to me, I was wondering what precisely he disliked about the film. Was he fundamentally critical of the New Order's anti-Communist propaganda, and did he regret the fact that the film did not go far enough to critique it? Did he view the heroes featured in the film as being too preoccupied with self-defence in distancing themselves from the poor Communists, at the expense of exposing the larger picture of what 'really happened' in 1965–66? Or was this young man a product of the New Order's 30 years of propaganda, believing that anyone who had been penalized by the New Order must have done something seriously bad, and thus any sympathetic portrayal of the lives, thoughts and activities of the former prisoners in *Tjidurian 19* as a simply unconvincing act of denial and deception? It is impossible to ascertain. Whatever the case might be, his remarks, body language, and early departure from the venue suggest the difficulties in producing any narrative about the 1965 massacre that can strike the right chord with a wide audience in Indonesia now, especially with young people. Even those who decided to stay on in the venue and who spoke during the question-and-answer sessions expressed their difficulty in following the film. This is even despite the fact that the film's co-directors represent a younger generation of Indonesian filmmakers.

Max Lane, an Australian long-term analyst and sympathizer of the Indonesian leftist movement, wrote a critical review of the film on his weblog after seeing it at the November screening. His stance leaves no room for ambiguity. While paying due respect to the artistic qualities of

the film, Lane considers the film a failure for a number of reasons. These are tied to its portrayal of the relative importance of the political stance of LEKRA, not only in relation to the PKI, but also to the broader social and domestic political situation and the global Cold War. To him, by emphasizing the genteel qualities of the LEKRA artists, the film has in fact depoliticized LEKRA:

> Indeed, I think it could be argued that LEKRA was the most intellectually radical part of the PKI oriented left. However, by giving no real emphasis and having no discussion at all of the real role LEKRA played as an ally of the PKI in the political struggle for state power, the activities of these writers is [sic] robbed of its [sic] ideological content and its political context.
>
> (Lane 2009)

On one hand I find myself agreeing with the general thrust of Lane's assessment. The film, and the event of its screening, represents a chronic deficit of both politics and a history that characterize most narratives of the 1965–66 killings and its aftermath. It appears that such a deficit is an effect of the political repercussions of the event that these narratives attempt to portray through images, sounds and words. On the other hand, I can sympathize with the filmmakers' efforts and difficulties. They themselves acknowledged in a series of conversations after the screening that they were—like their immediate audience—the product of a history different from the one in which Lane and I grew up in.

In the days that followed the screening I had a series of separate conversations with the co-directors of the film, Abduh Aziz (19 November and 1 December 2009) and Lasya Susatyo (20 and 24 November 2009). These conversations affirm many of the points I have raised above. Both co-directors are more interested in filmmaking and stories concerning the human condition and human qualities than in political issues per se. In terms of their background and the aspirations discussed in the previous chapter, they are more closely aligned with young filmmakers such as Lexy Rambadeta than with many NGO activists, or with Putu Oka Sukanta and his Institute of Creative Humanity (Lembaga Kreatifitas Kemanusiaan, LKK), which sponsored the production of *Tjidurian 19*. Both Abduh and Lasya granted that they were probably products of New Order schooling and propaganda. Neither of them had previously met anyone in their immediate circles who was victimized during the 1965 turmoil. It must have been a big leap and a big decision for these

young Indonesians to make *Tjidurian 19*. Rather than being a liability, their age and limited contact with the 1965 political prisoners potentially could have been rare assets for possibly closing the generation gap mentioned earlier. But as the post-screening question-and-answer session in November 2009 suggests, such critical connections are far from easy or certain.

In their immediate circles neither Abduh nor Lasya had been taught to understand the utopian cause of any Communist Party, let alone the Party's work in practice. Abduh told me he had seen the film *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* more than ten times and had internalized its message. Like many of his peers, when angry, he would use "Communists" as a swear word and insult. Growing up in a family of pious Muslims, he was of the view that the PKI were "evil, criminals, and immoral infidels". This perception began to change when he studied history at university in Jakarta. Before making the film, Lasya had neither heard of the protagonists nor had any interest in knowing what LEKRA was. As she put it:

> They were never mentioned in our school. Outside the school, they represented those involved in the PKI, and were thus dangerous to mention or discuss. My family and neighbors are all civil servants. My uncles and aunts were generals in the military, members of the parliament, or civil servants.[4]

Growing up under the New Order and post-New Order, Abduh developed a strong distrust of political parties in ways that should remind us of the sentiment among those who embraced post-Islamist piety in response to Islamist politics (*see* Chapters 2 and 3). This was one reason that motivated him to make a film that emphasized the human and personal sides of the protagonists in their everyday life instead of party politics, much to the dismay of viewers from an older generation like Max Lane. Abduh was also aware of previous filmic works that countered the New Order propaganda. These works did not impress him because of their narrow focus on the intra-political elite conflicts, at the expense of showing the plight of ordinary citizens. He hypothesized, if he was to address these high-level political issues, he would prefer to do that through scholarly analysis rather than film. Without specifically referring

[4] It is worth noting that the Indonesian word for "civil servants" is "state servants".

to LKK's earlier works, Lasya added that she was decidedly uninterested in films that evoke pity from the audience (mockingly she said, "look how badly we suffered"), films that strongly express anger, or films that depict a tragedy and leave the viewers in distress. Abduh and Lasya grew up in a world that was not only different, but also seemingly disconnected from that of their parents and grandparents. Sparked by factors attributed to globalized political divisions (decolonization, nation-building, the Cold War) down to neighborhood, family, and personal relations, it was difficult and perhaps impossible for members of the earlier generations to be exempted from grand, and occasionally romanticized, narratives of political change, ideological jargon, and formal associations.

It is easy, but nonetheless erroneous, to belittle the political value of *Tjidurian 19*, and overlook the broader perspective. I find Abduh and Lasya among the more politically and historically enlightened Indonesians of their generation. One journalist's report of interviews with several university students in Jakarta from mid-2009 gives a hint of a more general picture of the younger generation today. Most of the university students (undergraduates and graduates in their 20s) confessed that they had never heard of the mass killings in 1965–66. One of them, a law student when asked whether the story should be told to the nation, she replied, "What for? The Suharto era has ended" (Siahaan 2009). The title of the report, "The Forgotten History of 1965", is obviously problematic. As the content of the report indicates, for many young Indonesians, the troubled history has not been, and indeed cannot be "forgotten" or "remembered" since it has never even registered in their minds. Until then, silence means ignorance rather than restraint, fear, trauma, or avoidance. By no means is this a uniquely Indonesian phenomenon. "Fewer and fewer young people know much about the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the Rape of Nanking or the Chinese Cultural Revolution" (Kaplan and Wang 2008a: 12). The list should soon include more recent pasts, such as the Vietnam War, Saweto, Santa Cruz, and Tiananmen.

Even if we go one generation back, political critiques in literary or cinematic narratives of New Order crime in 1965–66 are few and far between. The majority of the literary works and the few cinematic works with this theme tend to reaffirm rather than challenge the New Order's master narrative of Communist brutality, even when they depict the plight of the 1965 victims. There exist several exceptions, most of which are authored by survivors or relatives of the anti-Communist propaganda. It is worth repeating a point I mentioned in the previous chapter that in

most literary or cinematic works with the 1965–66 setting, the villain is a left-leaning character, a cunning person who either misleads others into Communist ideas and into supporting the Communist Party, or someone innocent who is gullible enough to be misled or someone who has the misfortunate of being related to the Communists by blood or marriage. Invariably, these works convey one message: these characters must ultimately be killed, or saved for redemption. When they are killed, the blame falls squarely on them. Foulcher (1990) analyzes such a theme in the novel *Anak Tanahair: Secercah Kisah* by Ajip Rosidi (1985), and I found a similar theme in the film *Gie* (2005, Riza), which was selected as Best Film of the Year at the 2006 Indonesian Film Festival (Heryanto 2008a). What is conspicuously absent in many of these works is the role of the Indonesian military and civilian perpetrators of the 1965 killings, with a rare exception being the film *Sang Penari* (*The Dancer*) (2011, Isfansyah). In this award-winning film, the Communists are still the bad guys, but the film is sympathetic to the many poor and innocent villagers who are killed by the military. However, even here, the deaths of the poor villagers appear to be largely due to their own fault for being too close to the Communists, as a result of their ignorance or lack of intelligence about the dangers of Communism.

Today, young Indonesians are active agents, but are still subjected to the pressures of a new time and environment remarkably different from that of the Cold War years. Most urban middle-class Indonesians today are neither pressured nor incentivized to engage with any large political movement to confront major global issues—with one significant exception being the Islamist political movements (*see* Chapters 2 and 3). For the majority who are more secular minded, or more comfortable with post-Islamist visions, engagement with global issues has been concentrated on issues related to the consumption of entertainment commodities along international trends (*see* Chapter 7), or social justice as that which circulates on their social media networks.

Understandably, revisiting the 1965 massacre has never been attractive to many of the younger generation. As Zurbuchen writes, at moments of social change "representations of the past may disappear, be transformed, and acquire or lose authoritativeness" (2005: 8). The future prospect of Indonesians' engagement with the troubled past is not only difficult, but also full of uncertainties. It was precisely at the moment when the issue of the 1965–66 killings started to disappear, that a major turning point took place, and a new hope emerged: the release of a new documentary film, to which the next section is devoted.

Narrative of Obscenity and Excesses[5]

Earlier I have mentioned that I made an exception by including a discussion of the internationally-produced documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012, Oppenheimer) in this chapter. This is an extremely unusual film and there are at least three very strong reasons to justify this exception. First, the film is exceptional in its method of production. Second, the making of the film involves a large number of Indonesians, including those who take on the roles of filmmaker, actors, or both. Internationally lauded by top cinephiles and critics from around the world, this film radically challenges some of the old and familiar assumptions in the study of politics and violence, and the current understanding of what constitutes a documentary film. Third, this is arguably the most powerful film on the 1965–66 killings, with the potential for generating far-reaching political, moral, if not legal, impact on the general public in Indonesia. Indeed, with the wider distribution of this film the scholarship on the 1965–66 killings in Indonesia, Indonesia and the study of the country's politics more generally, will never be the same again.

Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer with co-directors Christine Cynn and a number of "Anonymous" Indonesians, the documentary is the product of seven years of hard work, involving almost 1,000 hours of footage. It focuses on the testimony and reflective commentary of several leading figures from the nation's largest local paramilitary organization Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth), who were responsible for the killing of hundreds of real or suspected Communists in North Sumatra in 1965–66, as part of a nationwide pogrom that took approximately one million lives.

In the previous chapter I discussed the series of anti-Communist propaganda films (and television dramas) produced by the New Order government, all emphasizing the fantasized cruelty and inhumane character of the Communists. The previous chapter also analyzed several post-1998 shorts and documentary films that challenge such anti-Communist

[5] Beyond brief layperson's comments, I do not have the qualifications for, or immediate interest in, discussing the cinematographic qualities and innovations of the film. My main interest is in discussing the social, political and cultural significance of the content as well as the initial impacts of the release of the film in Indonesian context. An earlier and significantly different version of the ideas presented in this section has appeared as a review of the film in Heryanto (2012b).

propaganda. These later films boldly reverse the position of good versus evil, which was firmly implanted in the nation's official history by successive governments and their supporters, and is best exemplified by *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* (1984, Noer). However, a reversal of this kind only reproduces, and does not eliminate or problematize, the fundamental framework of a good versus evil dichotomy that structures government propaganda and the public imagination. In another important aspect, both the anti-Communist as well as the anti-New Order films share something in common, namely the absence of scenes showing the faces and voices of real people who have either self-identified or been alleged by others to be perpetrators of the 1965 crimes: torturers, arsonists, looters, rapists, and killers. In the New Order-sponsored propaganda films and offscreen statements, those suspected of being either the perpetrators or their sponsors and supporters speak of themselves as either victims of the Communists or national heroes who have saved Indonesia by crushing the Communists. In the anti-New Order films, the 1965–66 criminals are described, named, and condemned with indignation, but on screen they are simply absent.

In remarkable contrast, *The Act of Killing* is as fascinating as it is disturbing for its explicit presentation of the faces and voices of some of the self-identified killers in the 1965–66 massacres in North Sumatra. In fact, they are the leading characters of the film, which runs for two and a half hours in its entirety, consisting mainly of them describing in obscene detail how they proceeded with the massacre. The documentary verbally and graphically visualizes acts of violence that make the horrors in the previous documentaries (allusions to anti-Communist captors, torturers, rapists), as well as in *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* (the evils of an allegedly Communist-backed movement against six rightist generals and one lieutenant), pale into insignificance. Indeed, leading actors in *The Act of Killing* self-incriminate far more seriously than in any of the preceding films. But this new documentary goes much further than simply validating or reinforcing the survivors' allegations about the cruelty of the military-orchestrated anti-Communist pogrom. It presents this narrative of the killings within a complex story, with multi-layered sub-narratives, rich with irony and contradiction.

The Act of Killing is important to our discussion not because it brings new facts or evidence about the violence of 1965–66 but because it offers a highly compelling narrative of excess. The film consists of an exuberant number of extravagantly-styled self-incriminations by the 1965 executioners, who speak authentically and proudly to the camera about

how they pushed their cruelty to the extreme when killing the Communists and members of their families, and raping their female victims, including children. At this point, the notion of 'history' is complicated enough. However, these perpetrators-cum-actors go on to demonstrate, step-by-step, in front of the camera, how they carried out the killings at the original sites of their actions in 1965, thus rendering the survivors' allegations of their crimes redundant. *The Act of Killing* exposes in a most horrific fashion what successive Indonesian governments have erased from official history and government pronouncements since 1966, and what aging survivors and eyewitnesses have painfully tried to disseminate through their onscreen and offscreen testimonies.

More than one of the perpetrators in *The Act of Killing* claims that their film will outdo the government's infamous *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* in portraying scenes of horrendous violence. They remark that the general public is utterly wrong to assume (in line with the New Order government propaganda) that the Communists were cruel or brutal. One of them says bluntly "We are crueler than the Communists", and punctuates this with a chuckle. They elaborate on what they mean in great detail, both through words and re-enactments to camera. The perpetrators' recollection of their own crime is marked by their laughter, song and dance, with only the occasional sign of remorse or report of nightmares.

I was privileged to have been given access by the director to a series of rough cuts of the film, and then the final version, in the course of the last two years of the film's production. At the time of writing, the film was just being premiered largely underground in Indonesia; events were by invitation-only and private (due to security reasons). Naturally, I was very curious how the general public in Indonesia might react to the film, and if it would ever be available for the general viewing either through select studios, on DVD, or via the internet. Even leaving the issue of public reaction aside for a moment, the film itself prompts several methodological and ethical questions of special interest to this study, in addition to the political and legal ones.

The first set of questions concerns methods. How did the filmmakers manage to persuade these perpetrators to speak so freely, and in such self-incriminating ways, without concealing their identities? It was evident that no hidden camera was involved in its production. Presupposing that these individuals were active participants in the filmmaking project, the question can be reformulated from their perspective: why would these perpetrators incriminate themselves at such a serious

level, and so liberally, whilst presumably knowing full well that their statements would eventually be widely disseminated to the public? What did they wish to gain for themselves or give to the audience? While they might have been extremely cruel in their youth, could they possibly, some 40 years later, be so foolish as to not be aware of the risks involved in making their self-incriminating statements the way they did? The second set of questions relates to ethical issues. Regardless of the political aptness and risk-awareness of these actors, I initially wondered if the filmmakers had given them viewing access to the recordings, so that they could judge reflexively for themselves how they appeared on screen, and gauge its potential impact both on themselves and on their audience. Had the filmmakers actually discussed these issues and confronted the actors with the kind of questions that the film audience would likely raise? The third set of questions interrogates issues of truth. Regardless of what these perpetrators have said about what they did to the Communists in 1965–66, to what extent do their statements and re-enactments represent the actual events of 1965–66? How do we know and assess this? How much fact and/or fiction have gone into constructing the narratives in this film? Does it matter? The remaining space of this section is devoted to providing preliminary answers to these questions.

One answer to the first set of questions is evident throughout the film, namely the executioners' boasting. Director Oppenheimer investigates this point further in a separate, but directly related component of his larger project (Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo 2009). The executioners are well aware of the risks involved, and their discussions about these risks are on record. However, the boasting thesis prompts further and more important questions. We must ask under what conditions—real or perceived—these 1965–66 executioners could have the pleasure and the privilege of boasting so liberally about what they admit to as their "crimes". What circumstances made it possible for them to enjoy a full and extended period of impunity? Perhaps sometimes we all enjoy boasting in front of some people. This does not mean, however, that most people will do so about absolutely anything, at any time, and before the general public. Selected scenes in *The Act of Killing* provide highly instructive answers. The protagonists in this film enjoy the patronage of their fellow executioners and other anti-Communist politicians who have successfully climbed the political ladder. Some of them have been running the country or provinces in the past several decades. Top national and local politicians who serve as their patrons appear in the film, demonstrating their strong relations with members of the local

paramilitary, including the film's protagonists. We will return to this issue in the next section.

With the executioners having full self-confidence, the filmmakers did not need to persuade them to speak to the camera as frankly as they did. To ensure that fundamental ethical requirements were appropriately observed, the filmmakers did more than discuss the project and get a formal statement of consent from these executioners. The director shared the rough footage with the film actors-cum-political executioners (Question 2). The latter's viewing of the footage, and their comments on the footage as they watched, were recorded and these scenes constitute important parts of *The Act of Killing*. This is one area where the filmmakers display their innovation, but it is also the point when things start to get spectacularly and incredibly complicated. Instead of simply filming these remarkably boastful individuals as objects of an actively rolling camera, director Oppenheimer invites them to take a large share in the process of filmmaking. Oppenheimer offers them the liberty to tell their stories in a cinematic framework, by creating a fictive story for their collaborative project, based on their memory and fantasizing of their 1965–66 killings, and also on their personal reflective response in the present on those first-hand experiences—all to be performed for the camera (thus the film title). These former executioners take part in the work of scripting, set design, music, casting and the shooting of a film that they hypothetically produce and star in. *The Act of Killing* shows how they prepare and produce their film, and how they comment on the footage that results from their collaborative work, as well as the unintended consequences of the experience upon the life of at least one of the protagonists. Oppenheimer also asks some of them quite bluntly about their preparedness to face possible charges of war crimes. One of them responds mockingly: "Please—tell them to indict me!", in full confidence of his impunity to prosecution.

The Act of Killing is a documentary film about historical agents, their testimonies, and how these agents make another film to narrate their own crimes in 1965–66. It presents an oral history investigation of that bloody period, and first-hand recollections from some of the executioners. It is also about the executioners' consciously drafted fictions and re-enactments as a medium through which they articulate their memories and comment on those memories, which is informed by the violent images they see in Hollywood gangster and western movies of the 1960s, not long before the killings proceeded in late 1965 or early 1966. Therefore, instead of relegating the protagonists to a mere object of someone

else's rolling camera, the director allows them to co-author their own self-incriminating narratives in a cinematic form, which they do with considerable liberty, wit, laughter and pleasure. In the meantime, with a second camera, the director takes a long shot of their activities of film-making about their atrocity, which ultimately yields *The Act of Killing*.

One can never be fully sure of what the protagonists intended to achieve from the project. On screen, they declare their intention, namely to "tell history truly as it is" to the world, not just to Indonesia. In a highly ironic gesture, they question the truth about the cruelty of the Communists and the alleged orgy of GERWANI at the Lubang Buaya as widely disseminated in the New Order's anti-Communist propaganda. This is the same propaganda and the same regime that they staunchly supported nearly half a century earlier. But *The Act of Killing* is neither a story of repentance, nor one of heroism as the actors had hoped. While Oppenheimer is careful not to give the protagonists a chance to become self-appointed heroes, neither does he make them look like complete fools or monsters. Apparently fully unscripted, one of the most senior, boastful and brutal executioners is unable to contain his own emotion, or the guilt that belies their machismo, after a series of acting and re-enactments with his fellows, in which they, in rotation, take on the role of a tortured Communist captive.

Framed as such, the selected "facts" of interviews and casual conversations with the executioners recorded in the 2000s about their crime in the mid-1960s, plus scenes of their everyday life, are interwoven in *The Act of Killing* with consciously invented fiction and memories of their past. All converge before the camera to produce an extremely surrealistic account of a complex story, with moments of horror, laughter, singing and dancing, full of irony and surprising slippages. More than about what happened in 1965–66, the film is about present-day Indonesia, how the past was remembered in the present by some of the 1965–66 executioners, and how these killers wished the world to remember them and their actions through the medium of film. Significantly, no historical footage from the 1960s appears in this film, underscoring the filmmaker's primary interest in the present instead of the past. *The Act of Killing* is fundamentally distinct from all previously produced films that focus on the 1965–66 killings and its aftermath. It does not attack one regime of historical truth in order to install a new one. Rather, it explores the multi-layered fragments of personal narratives of truth, fear, pride, and hatred pertaining to the events in the mid-1960s, where distinctions between fact and fiction, heroes and villains, legitimate power and crimes

against humanity are not easily drawn or unanimous. Ultimately (in relation to the third set of questions), the final outcome is no less instructive than any of the preceding films on the subject, including those with a sole commitment to factual truths (as in the form of survivor testimonies in post-1998 films) or with wild fabrication (as in the anti-Communist New Order government propaganda films). They are all highly instructive in different ways; not so much for the specific, crude, empirical 'facts' the films convey or come to constitute in a coherent format about what 'really' happened in the past. But more importantly, all these films are instructive about what their enunciations might mean to contemporary politics in the present, just as much as they are instructive about the conditions of the past and present, which make their actions, recollections and re-enactments possible.

Several scenes in *The Act of Killing* show how the actors-cum-killers, and the organization they represent, have built strong and long-standing relationships with various state officials at the national level (members of the parliament, the office of the presidency, state ministries) all the way down to the local levels (local parliament, governorship, commercial print media and local branch of the state television network). Instead of being fully occupied with disclosing the true story or history about serious crimes against humanity in the past, *The Act of Killing* also vividly demonstrates how gangsterism continues to be just as deeply embedded within formal politics, state administration and everyday life in Indonesia's much lauded democracy today. Only by taking this important fact into account, can we make some sense of the incredible self-incrimination, self-confidence, and bragging remarks in the documentary.

Gangsterism, Film, and History

What distinguishes post-New Order governments from their predecessors is the establishment of formal democratic institutions, leading to the "normalization" of Indonesian politics (Aspinall 2005). The recently achieved status quo implies a renewed shared power in the hands of professional politicians who either have a long history of leadership in street gangsterism in the past, or have continued supporters among present day organized militia groups. In post-New Order Indonesia, even the myth of 'people power' has lost its appeal and relevance, as its fundamental reason to exist—challenging a single center of state power with an extraordinarily repressive apparatus—has ceased. Power and violent repression have been so decentralized throughout the nation, and more than ever

before have been operating in increasingly insidious and horizontal ways, involving more non-state agents and increasingly autonomous, if not competing, groups of militias. Public debates on political issues no longer focus on spectacular cases of brutal violence by state officials against the disadvantaged masses. Instead, recent debates have focused on intra-elite conflicts—highly personalized disputes, embezzlements and sexual scandals—that have little or no direct consequences for a general population, which is already fragmented by cycles of conflict that appear, on the surface at least, to take either a religious or ethnic-based form.

Here is one irony of history and social change. Decades of the New Order's mega-investment in propaganda has had the unintended effect of keeping counter-propaganda alive and has led to the romanticizing of populist politics among many disenchanted members of the population, from both the left and right ends of the political spectrum. Those living under the military dictatorship of the New Order, who may or may not have personally experienced victimization, would not require special education to know, fear or resent the regime's brutality and the sinister nature of its propaganda. Metaphorically speaking, for every five Indonesians who might have been susceptible to the New Order's propaganda regarding "the imminent danger of Communism", there could be one for whom the same propaganda would immediately imply the opposite. Each incident of censorship, ban, and act of propaganda has led the few critically minded citizens to imagine, investigate, or suspect the reverse: what the New Order might have deliberately concealed or twisted underneath the official pronouncements, bans, museums, laws, and films. Domination paradoxically invents, denies, and reproduces resistance. The demise of the New Order has brought about a major decline of a sustained popular uprising against the government and the divided elite.

There remains a further ironic twist. By any account, *The Act of Killing* is absolutely flabbergasting on screen. However, by no means does it imply that a new official history of the 1965–66 with any significant degree of credibility will soon replace the existing one in Indonesia. Indeed, it does not make it any easier to predict when the film will have a full effect on the Indonesian public and history textbooks, and the extent of its influence, if it has any at all. All the foregoing has shown that the New Order propaganda about what happened in the mid-1960s has outlived the regime that authored it. *The Act of Killing* promises a beginning to the end of such sanctified propaganda. If and when such an optimistic event transpires, we may witness the biggest irony that most people from opposing positions in the history of the 1965–66 killings

will have to confront: that the nation's biggest and most atrocious deception is being ripped apart, not so much through the efforts of some extraordinarily resilient survivors with the most damning testimonies, or by some experts who speak eloquently on their behalf, but by a bunch of boastful killers whom many of us would love to hate.

At the time of writing, segments within the Indonesian public were excited as media reports about the launch of the film in North America and West Europe, and reviews of the film were published on social media and the Indonesian mainstream news. The most powerful of these media publications was the special coverage of the newsmagazine *Tempo* (1–7 October 2012), which ran a 75-page editorial of stories and analysis of the 1965 killings, mostly from the unrepentant killers in various towns and cities in Java. Within the first few days of its publication, the issue sold out in some provinces, and the last few copies were sold by scalpers at double the retail price. Soon afterwards, on and after International Human Rights Day (10 December 2012),[6] many domestic NGOs worked separately to organize more than 50 sessions of free and by-invitation-only screenings of *Jagal* (the Indonesian version of *The Act of Killing*), in 40 towns and cities across the farthest east to the farthest west of the archipelagic nation. The film was screened in Banda Aceh, Medan, Padang, Pekanbaru, Lampung, Jakarta, Depok, Bandung, Sumedang, Majalengka, Cirebon, Yogyakarta, Semarang, Solo, Salatiga, Blora, Surabaya, Malang, Denpasar, Ubud, Mataram, Lombok Utara, Balikpapan, Samarinda, Makassar, Palu, Kupang, Ruteng, Manggarai, Ternate, Ambon, and Jayapura. Reactions to the screening posted on the various social media were common: a mixture of horror at the cruelty depicted, anger at having been deceived for decades by the government propaganda, relief at discovering parts of the truth about the 1965 violence, and appreciation for the film.

By way of concluding this chapter, I wish to elaborate on the last point, by returning to and highlighting the intersections among key issues that run through the previous chapters: (a) the critical power of coercion and violence that has reshaped the nation through violent dis-

[6] On the same date, *Tempo* received the 2012 Yap Thiam Hien Human Rights Awards in Jakarta. It is the first media company to be awarded this most prestigious award in Indonesia for significant contribution to the protection of human rights in the country.

memberment and an imposed unity by fear; (b) the difficulty or impossibility of achieving a relatively stable and credible historiography on the nation's violent past, and especially on the 1965–66 massacre; (c) the rise of Islamism and post-Islamism; and (d) the importance of film as an extension of the social forces engaged in the nation's battle for power and legitimacy, as well as a medium that articulates and problematizes opposing categories: facts and fiction, domination and subversion, patriotic heroism and criminality. As suggested above, *The Act of Killing* is an example par excellence of how documentary film destabilizes familiar notions of opposites. Its primary contribution to our concerns in this study is not to add any particular factual information about the past in North Sumatra, but to open renewed spaces for imagination and discussion about what it means to remember and discuss a past massacre in the present, and in extremely graphic ways.

Here I need to bring into our discussion the fine scholarly works of Loren Ryter on the history and politics of Pemuda Pancasila in North Sumatra, especially in the province's capital city of Medan. In many important ways, the film *The Act of Killing* and Ryter's writings are two different narrative modes working in mutually complementary and equally compelling ways, on highly overlapping subjects, protagonists and their action. Some of the episodes shown through re-enactments in the documentary *The Act of Killing* are narrated in detail in Ryter's unpublished doctoral thesis, which he completed ten years earlier (2002). In fact, some of the verbal and apparently unscripted statements from the 1965–66 executioners appearing in the documentary closely resemble the direct quotes in Ryter's thesis, except we cannot see the faces of Ryter's sources. Even their real names are concealed, making it hard to ascertain whether the words cited in Ryter's study belong to the same men whose identities are fully disclosed in the documentary.

Indeed, working in different media, and under very different stylistic imperatives, leads Ryter's and Oppenheimer's projects toward very different outcomes in terms of orientation, scope and content. Oppenheimer's documentary is concerned with the ethics and politics of narrating the atrocities of the past in the present. Although Ryter also acknowledges that his work is necessarily a history of the present (2002: 9), it demonstrates with admirable success an attempt to collect a variety of information about the past, piecing it together into a coherent narrative for scholarly analysis and theoretical consideration that enables us in the present to have a fairly good idea of what might have happened

in 1965–66. Ryter provides us with much more abundant material that does not appear in Oppenheimer's documentary, namely the broader contexts and extra details of the events that led to the 1965–66 killings in Medan. For instance, instead of focusing on the crimes, testimonies and fantasies of a few individuals (as the documentary does), Ryter discusses the broader political and economic disputes among local groups of thugs—concerning territorialized movie ticket scalping—of which the protagonists in *The Act of Killing* and their brutal killings are a small, albeit important, part. In fascinating detail, Ryter also shows how these largely local street-level turf wars have over time been drawn and incorporated into a larger and more ideologically-charged nation-wide party politics, as the nation became caught up in the global tension of the Cold War and bore the brunt of its escalating heat from the mid-1960s.

But in one important aspect, the film does something powerful, with a potentially far-reaching impact on the general public in Indonesia that no scholarly text could ever hope to achieve. I refer to the film's dramatically crafted visual and audio representation of the authentic voice of key agents of the events, as if they were speaking directly to the viewers; this has the potential effect of immediacy in disclosing the truth and reality of what happened in 1965–66. Indeed the sensation that comes from watching what appears on screen is too authentic and obscenely transparent to be found in any textual scholarly work. While the visual and moving representation of immediacy and authenticity is the film's major strength, Ryter's scholarly work is superior in terms of comprehensiveness and critical analysis. Although the film does not claim to represent the 1965 events objectively, *The Act of Killing* has a large impact potential because of its sheer shock factor. In no way does the documentary film attempt to show us what really happened in 1965–66, for example through the use of archived footage from the period. Instead, it overtly displays a series of fictional versions of disturbingly cheerful testimonies and lavish re-enactments in the present by key agents of the 1965–66 killings.

One of the multiple layers of the troubling revelations of Indonesia's history and politics from *The Act of Killing* consists of the many scenes that point to close relationships between the self-confessed political criminals and many government officials. These relationships can take the form of convenient alliances between the murderers and state officials, which sometimes result in the former gaining government office in return for services rendered to the latter. Viewers of *The Act of Killing*

may be stunned by the scope of such a network, and the frankness with which the individuals discuss it for the camera. All these people and their stories shown in the documentary are but a small but important fraction of a bigger picture, which is revealed and analyzed in the work of Ryter (1998, 2002, 2009) and Wilson (2006, 2008, 2011). Instead of just getting a few glimpses of the extraordinary impunity displayed in the documentary, the separate works by Ryter and Wilson confirm and elaborate on the general public's view of how thuggery permeates the entire nation-state and is firmly entrenched and even semi-officially institutionalized at the level of the state and within the social fabric of everyday life, far beyond Medan and North Sumatra, the setting of *The Act of Killing*. Wilson observes:

> *preman* [thugs] and other violent entrepreneurs have increasingly been able to negotiate on their own terms, transforming from subhegemonic groups, rent-a-thugs and middle-men to significant political and social actors in their own right. Elite patronage, while 'useful', is no longer a necessity for survival. The relationship of interdependence has in this respect tilted in favour of the *preman*, a process of 'inverse racketeering' whereby political elites have increasingly become clients rather than providers of protection.
>
> (2011: 245)

According to Ryter, in post-New Order government between 2004 and 2009, "[a]lmost half of all members of parliament (45 per cent) listed some youth-group affiliation on their [curriculum] vitas" (2009: 190), "youth-group" being a thinly-veiled official euphemism for state-sanctioned umbrella network of mass organizations, largely dominated by paramilitary, militias and organized gangsters.

However, as Ryter and Wilson elaborate, with the changing configurations and serious fragmentation of power within the top political elite, the future of Indonesia as a republic of gangsters is less certain. As both Ryter (1998, 2009) and Wilson (2006, 2008, 2011) have observed, there has been a major dispersal, or 'democratization' if you like, of political and organized violence in this society, with a significant number of them seeking new patrons, affiliations and opportunities in Islamic-based mass organizations of various kinds. One of Wilson's interviewees, a thug who just joined the Islam Defenders Front, told him: "Now, in the *reformasi* era, nationalism, defending the state (*bela bangsa*) and all that shit don't cut it anymore. It's the groups that are about jihad and

fighting vice (*maksiat*) that are the way to go" (Wilson 2008: 193). Not all these organizations, or their members simply use Islam instrumentally as a cover to pursue material gains, but a significant number of rank and file members reportedly do so (Wilson 2008: 194, 207). In varying degrees, these organizations accommodate unemployed youth and former thugs into their organization, which have also pursued ideological interests, based on an identity politics of ethnicity or religion. This point brings us back full circle to the story in Chapters 2 and 3 about the hijacking of Islamist politics and rhetoric by members of the secular and dominant political parties.

One of the remarkable, and least expected, revelations in *The Act of Killing* was the centrality of film as a medium in the lead up to the killing spree in 1965–66. There were multiple relationships between the killers and the American movies shown in Medan as well as their motives and their style of killing their enemies in Medan. Earlier I mentioned that a few executioners who star in the documentary identify as movie ticket scalpers. Offscreen, these scalpers occupied a space immediately outside and surrounding the theatre to make their living; they also watched and admired many Hollywood movies of various genres. At the end of the screening they often left the movie houses behaving as if they were the characters in the movie, walking off the screen into the streets. Likewise, in *The Act of Killing* there are plenty of scenes and testimonies from these executioners that indicate they took inspiration from the brutal style of killing in Western or horror movies when it came to taking the lives of their Communist captives in real life in 1965–66. Accordingly, in the re-enactment of their killings, the former executioners chose to wear costumes that mimic the American gangsters in films that they saw and remembered.

There is also one passing statement by two protagonists in the documentary to the effect that the campaigns in the mid-1960s for boycotting American films and American popular cultures more generally had threatened the livelihood of these scalpers. Since the Communists had been one of the advocates of the boycott, this action had been used as one of the pretexts for crushing the local Communists. Offscreen, director Oppenheimer also mentioned one extra dimension of the relationship between the story that *The Act of Killing* tells and the film industry in Indonesia. He refers to a senior journalist, Ibrahim Sinik, who appears with his full identity in the film, claiming to have been deeply involved in organizing the mass murder that took place on the second floor of his office and playing the role of a mediator with the

local military commander. Intriguingly, in the words of director Oppenheimer, this senior journalist who

> was secretary general of all the anti-Communist organizations that participated in the killings, and who directly gave the orders to Anwar's death squad, turned out to be a feature film producer, screenwriter, and former head of the Indonesian Film Festival.
>
> (2012)

One might suspect all of the above is a bit odd or purely idiosyncratic or coincidental, and that those details would not have been visible had they not been noticed by a filmmaker such as Oppenheimer. Actually, there is nothing odd or coincidental about these details when one considers the broader historical context. Even as a political scientist with no particular interest in the film industry per se, Ryter points to the politics and economics of the local film distribution and scalping in Medan as the single most important factor, among several others, to explain why it was Pemuda Pancasila that became a leading force in the killings of the Communists in North Sumatra (2002: 31). If Oppenheimer's documentary helps many people like me to see Indonesia and documentary films in a radically new way, Ryter's work helps me see both Indonesia and Oppenheimer's documentary in even fresher ways.

In this paragraph I will highlight some of the most important points in Ryter's study (2002) that are directly relevant to our discussion, but are invisible in *The Act of Killing*. From the 1950s, film was the most important medium of entertainment for the modernizing nation; Medan, being Indonesia's third largest city, was no exception. Ryter describes the arrival of an electric company eloquently: "in Medan, the advent of electrical 'illumination' corresponded to the introduction of the moving image, producing a certain identification between modem enlightenment and cinematographic representation" (2002: 44). Materially, the tax revenue from film distribution in Medan was very significant to local government coffers, as well as to the scalpers. Following the rapid growth and ethnic heterogeneity of Medan's population, organized youth gangs mushroomed, and movie ticket scalping in several movie houses became one major aspect of rivalry and violent turf wars among the various youth gangs.

As conflicts in party politics at the national level intensified in the 1960s, fuelled by the global Cold War, everyday life among ordinary Indonesians became rapidly and intensely politicized, and the nation became deeply divided. It was at this moment that the long-standing,

preliminary localized street gangsterism acquired a new status and dimension, and commenced down a deadly path. "By the early 1960s, contestation over control of 'scalped' bioscope [movie] tickets coalesced with the changing terrain of national competition for political power" (Ryter 2002: 47). One gang who lost control over a more prestigious scalping territory around The Medan Theatre had supported the anti-American film boycott that had impacted on the means of survival for a rival gang with close associations to Pemuda Pancasila. Therefore, in the eyes of the latter, the former gang was a bunch of "Communists"—at least by association, if not by genuine ideological conviction. The political conflicts among top state elite in Jakarta were further destablished by events in late September and early October 1965 (*see* Chapter 4), and the effects quickly trickled down to various provinces in Indonesia. In Medan, this galvanized the 1965–66 massacres in the form it did, with the Pemuda Pancasila being in the forefront of the killings of suspected Communists, including rival gangster groups perceived to be associated with the Communist Party.

The intriguing position of the film industry in the history of Indonesia's modernity and political violence does not stop there. In the next chapter I will examine another series of important events both before and after 1965, when the soul-searching efforts of defining the nation's identity involved a long history of erasure of an important minority group that has played a key role, among others, in the nation's film industry.

CHAPTER 6

Ethnic Minority Under Erasure

The previous four chapters have shown us how serious, and often deadly, conflicts can flare up when certain groups of people exert their coercive strength in order to impose a set of social identities through excluding other groups and denying them a legitimate position in public life. This chapter will discuss one such related politics of exclusion: those labelled or who self-identify as the ethnic 'Chinese' in Indonesia, on- and offscreen.[1] This chapter argues that the merit in examining discrimination against this particular ethnic minority lies not simply or exclusively in making an argument for justice or recognition for the victims. Rather, it enables us to take the next step and confront a couple of broader issues, which can only be outlined briefly in this chapter. The first is in recognizing the *fictiveness of ethnicity* that has widely been taken as objectively natural. The second is rediscovering the rich and fascinating history of *early modernity and trans-ethnic* interactions in the daily life of the population in the Dutch East Indies. This is the history of a highly vibrant social life that gave birth to the Indonesian nation and cinema in the early twentieth century, within which the so-called ethnic Chinese is only a part. Indeed, the case examined below illustrates how the making of a local version of modernity in the region—as a trans-ethnic and transnational project—is inseparable from the specific history of this prominent ethnic minority. By doing so, this chapter also offers a critique of the official history of the nation in Indonesia that has enjoyed endorsement and been reproduced in popular discussions as well as in scholarly works in English and Indonesian alike.

[1] For convenience, I will drop the quotation marks that sandwich a reference to this ethnic minority, except in a few cases when emphasis on such fictiveness is necessary.

Ethnicity as Fiction

Like stories in a film, ethnicity is fundamentally, though not entirely, a fiction. The same is true of a 'nation', just like 'Communism' in Indonesia since 1966, or 'Islam' in many parts of the world after the 9/11 attack in the US. However, this fiction has a material and tangible manifestation. If a cinematic narrative finds its public expression materially on the screen as a set of moving images, Chineseness in Indonesia acquires its social presence materially in their specifically-coded ID cards, specific cuisines, linguistic performances, or celebrations of certain festivals. However, there is no way of defining this ethnic group (or any other ethnic group) in any purely objectivist and materialist fashion, because what appears real is always fluid and only a fragment of what can only ever exist as fixed and static. Contrary to the general perception, the fiction precedes and invents the real.[2]

Both the fictiveness of ethnicity as legally introduced by the Dutch colonial administration and the rich culturally hybrid life of that society have been largely erased in the official history of the Indonesian nation, as well as with popular and journalistic versions. This erasure is a product of attempts by a small but powerful circle of the elite and the intelligentsia to privilege a narrowly-defined nativist conception of a 'pure' or 'authentic' Indonesia from the mid twentieth century onwards. A growing number of scholars of Indonesia have offered a criticism of such a history from a broad range of perspectives in a variety of forms. However, as demonstrated by a few compelling works (for examples in

[2] For a related discussion of the legal birth of ethnicity in this region in the 1870s, *see* Anderson (1991: 164–70) and Kahn (1989). In the specific case of the ethnic Chinese under Dutch colonial regime, historian Kemasang goes even further to argue that in order to segregate this ethnic group, the colonial government imposed laws to create their distinctiveness:

> for their segregation the Chinese were by law forced to wear the hairstyle in question, and other attributes, visually to distinguish them from other ethnic groups. Having thus forced the Chinese, the Dutch taxed them for the "privilege" … there were other exactions that only Chinese were subjected to, such as taxes on burial, marriage, and the performance of *wayang* (operetta) … a special tax for performing their version of the universal custom of rituals for the dead … a special levy for growing their finger nails long … These special exactions, yet again, served the Dutch more than one purpose. Not only did they enable them to milk the Chinese, but these exactions, by their "specialness", also helped to ensure the segregation of the victims from the rest of the population.
>
> (Kemasang 1985: 71)

English, *see* Anderson 1991; Barker 2010; Cohen 2006, 2009; Coppel 1999; Sen 2006; Strassler 2008; Winet 2010), most scholarly work on the topic in both English and Indonesian continue to succumb to this deeply problematic historiography, and are complicit in the reproduction of this official history.

By no means are Chinese Indonesians the only minority group in this overwhelmingly diverse nation to have fallen victim to explicit state-sanctioned discriminatory policies for an extended period of time. However, for a combination of the following reasons, the discursive construct of Chinese ethnicity in contemporary Indonesia is historically specific, making the discriminations against them especially intriguing. *First*, except for their compatriots of Indian descent, no other minority group has occupied the same economically privileged position since the colonial period to the present. Therefore, the unusually open and official discrimination against this minority is curious for the way it betrays the familiar notion that economic power is convertible to political or moral power or vice versa. Indeed, this is a remarkable instance of the aphorism 'money cannot buy everything'. However, to speak of the economic power of this ethnic group, or any other, is not without serious problems, because the very notion of ethnicity is deeply problematic (*see* Philpott 2000: 84–7).[3] Additionally, public imagination and discussion about this ethnic group's wealth is often riddled with overstatement and stereotyping. Even if we assume for a moment that "Chinese Indonesian" is a clear cut category, the precise scale of this group's wealth still remains open to debate and speculation.[4]

Second, along with those designated as Indian Indonesians as well as those with part European descent, many Chinese Indonesians have been prominent in the history of the performing arts, both onstage and onscreen. Ironically, until very recently, the role of these various ethnic

[3] Philpott takes the work of Richard Robison as a prime example of how an otherwise innovative politico-economic analysis, with serious attention to the dynamic historical process, can fall into the familiar and "static view of ethnicity" (Philpott 2000: 85).

[4] While economic disparity is obvious in day-to-day observation, its precise level and significance are open to debate. There is a significant number of Chinese Indonesians in the capital city of Jakarta, as well as outside the island of Java, who belong to the nation's poorest groups. It is also debatable whether it makes sense to speak of those wealthy business people as representing their ethnic group(s) except on official papers or through one's imagination.

groups have been almost entirely erased, or put under erasure in the official history and in public memory. This erasure is directly relevant to the core concerns of this book, and thus a substantial portion of this chapter will be devoted to this issue.

Third, more than any other ethnic minority groups (including those of Indian or European descent), Chinese Indonesians have been the single easiest target of recurring and state-sponsored mass violence for most of the twentieth century, with the incidents in 1998, which immediately preceded the formal collapse of the New Order regime, being the worst in many decades (*see* Purdey 2006). Elsewhere I have argued that this mass violence was state-sponsored racialized terror, as distinct from the general view that it was a series of racist "massive riots" (Ricklefs 2001: 406).[5]

> Anyone familiar with Indonesia is fully aware that no social group outside the state can possibly have even half of the capacity to conduct the violence of the magnitude and effectiveness as taking place in Jakarta and Surakarta …
>
> No racial or ethnic groups in Indonesia, no matter how agitated, could possibly inflict a systematic violence in which 1,198 lives (of which 27 died from gunfire) were lost, 150 females were raped, 40 shopping malls and 4,000 shops were burned down and thousands of vehicles and of houses were set afire simultaneously in 27 areas in a capital city of 10 million inhabitants in less than 50 hours. All was done without the culprit having to confront the state security forces or face indictment!
>
> (Heryanto 1999b)

During the anti-Communist violence in 1965–66, anti-Chinese slogans appeared side-by-side with anti-Communist slogans. So much so that many overseas observers had incorrectly assumed Chinese Indonesians made up a much larger percentage of those killed during the 1965 massacres than was actually the case. Except in a few places, such as Medan (as depicted in the film *The Act of Killing*, discussed in Chapter 5),

[5] The term "riots" implies a bottom up and spontaneous action, characteristically with the specific agency of the perpetrators, namely a recklessly angry mob. Such widely accepted scenarios imputes the crime to either an imagined collective mass that never existed, or innocent poor urbanites, many of whom had no voice to rebuke the accusation. Many of them lost their jobs or lives as a direct result of the 1998 violence (Heryanto 1999a: 314).

"the victims [of the 1965–66 massacre] were overwhelmingly members and associates of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Chinese Indonesians experienced serious harassment but relatively few were killed" (Cribb and Coppel 2009: 447). According to Robert Cribb and Charles Coppel, "[t]he genocide myth, however, is located outside Indonesia—amongst Westerners and Chinese—rather than within Indonesian society" (2009: 458). Interestingly, the same myth repeats itself in response to the racialized mass violence in 1998, particularly in Jakarta (and to a smaller extent in a few other cities), where more than 1,200 lives were lost, mainly people from non-Chinese ethnic background (Heryanto 1999a: 315).

The above incidents underscore the point I raised earlier, and will elaborate upon further in this chapter, that 'Chinese' Indonesian, like any other ethnicity, is a fiction that never refers unambiguously or consistently to specific individuals or groups of people. Such problematic labelling, plus the extended impunity that perpetrators of violence against minority groups have enjoyed, renders the everyday hostility toward and stigmatization of ethnic Chinese normal. In turn, the normalized discrimination makes it possible for those who dominate the discursive field in state administration and public debate to manipulate the ethnicity of this group into a malleable label, and mobilize flexibly particular meanings of terms such as '*Cina*' (Chinese) or 'non-*pribumi*' (non-natives) according to their interests of the day (*see* Aguilar Jr. 2001).

We need to turn this familiar logic on its head in order to better understand how ethnic politics operates in Indonesia. Many Indonesians after 1966 have been illegally detained, tortured, before being denied civil rights and stigmatized as 'Communists' for life, not necessarily because they had previously claimed to be Communists or expressed endorsement to the 'real' Communists (all of which were then legal). Quite the inverse. Those who have endured such violence and mistreatment will forever be identified as 'Communists', or a 'sympathizer', or a 'relative' to a 'Communist' or 'sympathizer' by blood or marriage (*see* Chapters 4 and 5, also Heryanto 2006a), expressly because of the state-sanctioned violence that has been inflicted upon them. Likewise, bodies were injured and windows were broken during the periodic anti-Chinese pogroms (such as in 1998), not because these bodies and windows belonged to the ethnic Chinese. Rather, those injuries and damages become markers to be inscribed upon a large number of bodies and windows to signify definitively to all, that the owners are henceforth 'Chinese'.

This chapter consists of three sections. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with Indonesian history, I will begin with a sketch of the political status of this ethnic minority in the past half a century or so. I will then go on with a section that interrogates the position of those labeled as 'Chinese' Indonesians in the film industry. In both sections, occasional comparisons with the status of the stigmatized Communists will be noted briefly. The third and final section will investigate how the nationalist history has attempted to overlook or deny the contribution of this ethnic minority (along with those of Indian or European descent) in the history of the nation's cinema industry. The official history of the Indonesian cinema was invented in early 1962, and legally endorsed in late 1999, purging both the contribution of the non-*pribumi* ethnic peoples (those of European or Chinese descent) as well as the leftist artists. This chapter will not include any in-depth content analysis of films that address the dynamics of interethnic relations. Such analysis has been done elsewhere (for recent samples in English, *see* Heryanto 2008a; Sen 2006; Setijadi-Dunn 2013).

Ethnicity Under Erasure

The similarities and differences between the political stigmatization of Chinese Indonesians and that of the Left (both real and perceived) in Indonesia are not difficult to discern, especially during the New Order regime (*see* Chapters 3 and 4). Both were essentially declared to be Indonesia's dangerous Others, with two important differences: the Chinese ethnic group was not entirely wiped out as the Communists were. Despite the Chinese Indonesians' politically pariah status and being a repeated target of mass violence, a significant number of business people from this ethnic group enjoyed an advantageous economic position throughout the New Order period. The good economic standing of this ethnic minority is especially visible in the three largest and most industrialized cities in the nation: Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan. These similarities and differences with the Left are not purely accidental. As we have seen earlier, the liquidation of the Communists and their perceived sympathizers in the mid-1960s was part of the political dynamics of the global Cold War at both a national and local level.

Having been systematically rejected as part of the nation's Self for many decades, and having occasionally been told to 'go back home' (to mainland China), the Chinese Indonesian community was declared guilty of multiple allegations made against them by the New Order regime.

First, they were regarded as a politically dangerous race, due to their presumed genealogical association with some imagined ancestors in mainland China, who lived under one of two of the world's most powerful Communist Parties. In turn, the global anti-Communist propaganda of the Cold War alleged that the Chinese Community Party of China (CPC) had supported the Indonesian Communist Party, already alleged to have masterminded the killing of the seven rightist military officers in 1965.[6] Despite such a plight, a significant number of the business people with a Chinese ethnic background has been among the leading groups of Indonesia's domestic capitalist class. In theory at least, they should be united in the same class position as other privileged groups of various ethnic groups, who fought against the Indonesian Communist Party. However, the reality belies such a scenario.

The ascendancy of the New Order regime to state power marked the immediate and complete reversal of a political rhetoric and propaganda (socialist-oriented and anti-Western) that prevailed under the preceding government. Foreign capital from the Western Bloc quickly returned to Indonesia on a large scale and—with generous assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the suppression of the labor unions—the nation's economic growth persisted impressively. Then the glaring paradox: just as the New Order state declared the political and cultural status of Chinese Indonesians most undesirable or dangerous to the Indonesian identity, the business empires of selected members of this ethnic group expanded to an unprecedented level, under the auspices of this very regime. To explain this seeming contradiction, one only needs to remind oneself of the fictiveness and

[6] In recent contribution to the study of Chinese Indonesians in the early twenty-first century, Sai and Hoon (2013: 4–5) note the familiar notion that the "anti-discrimination stance" brought the ideologically pluralist organization Baperki (whose members were predominantly Chinese Indonesians) and the Indonesian Communist Party into a happy alliance. While it is true that the two organizations have some common interests, more nuanced investigations of the personal friendships and rivalry among political leaders between and across the two bodies might reveal a more complicated story. Of special interest is the political ties between Baperki's Chair Siauw Giok Tjhan with Tan Ling Djie; Tan's fierce rivalry with Aidit who in 1951 ousted Tan from the Communist Party leadership, and the question of anti-Chinese sentiment that might have marred the personal rivalry between the two Communists (*see* Lev 1991: 105, fn.13; Anderson, 2002: 130–1, fn.2). I thank Siauw Tiong Djin and Charles Coppel for clarifying this thorny issue.

malleability of ethnicity at the hand of the regime of the day, and recognize the paradoxical nature of the New Order's strategy in managing the so-called ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

Scholars in the humanities have accepted the fictiveness of ethnicity and most other social identities, especially following the publication of two books, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; its revised edition in 1991 includes two new chapters, including one on the construction of racial categories with the invention of the census in the 1870s). Despite the increased awareness among scholars, the notion of race and ethnicity as something real, objective or natural continues to prevail both in the general public discourse as well as in the legally bound pronouncements of state officials. Commenting on the "census-makers' passion for completeness and unambiguity" during the colonial period, Anderson notes "their intolerance of multiple, politically 'transvestite', blurred, or changing identifications…. The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions" (1991: 166). During and after the decolonization of the former colonies, the internalization of such colonial categories hardened and gained more, instead of less, popularity and institutional support because it served the interests of the political elite and their supporters in independent Indonesia.

Under the New Order, access for Chinese Indonesians to state education and public service was limited. Entry to professions other than in the trade and industry sectors was limited or impossible. Culturally, 'Chineseness' was declared foreign; politically and morally it was perceived to be detrimental to the Indonesian Self as officially constructed. Chinese names for persons, organizations, and businesses had to be Indonesianized. The Chinese language, mass media, and organizations were eliminated and prohibited. Until the close of the twentieth century the Chinese script fell under the same category as explosives, pornography, and narcotics in the customs declaration forms that all visitors had to complete when entering the country. As late as the early 1990s, popular Chinese physical exercises, Mandarin songs in karaoke entertainment centers, and the sale of certain Chinese cakes were prohibited (Indrakusuma 1993; McBeth and Hiebert 1996; Subianto 1993; Suryadinata 1985). In 1990, in cities within the province of Central Java, no Mandarin song was allowed to be heard during the Lunar New Year's Eve celebrations (*Kedaulatan Rakyat* 1990). All of this was done under the pretext that

the New Order state was committed to assimilating the minority into the Indonesian body politic, by purging it of foreignness (i.e., Chineseness). However, the New Order 'assimilation' program was one that was designed to fail, because its success would undermine the interest of its own sponsors. To dissolve Chinese identities in an effective program of assimilation would mean giving up the division of labor by race upon which the status quo depended (Heryanto 1998a: 104).

It is not that difficult to see how the paradox of the New Order policy on Chinese ethnicity operated. It demonized the ethnic minority in political and cultural affairs, but at the same time favored selected members of this ethnic group in the business sector. The New Order bureaucrats preferred to give economic concessions to selected members of those branded 'Chinese Indonesians' and foreigners, at the expense of their equally capable counterparts from the so-called 'indigenous' or *pribumi* communities. Unlike the latter, the former would have no chance to transform itself into an independent social force of its own (for instance, a domestic bourgeoisie) with the potential of becoming a political opposition to the New Order elite. The slim chances for the Chinese business community to become a domestic bourgeoisie were due, in turn, to the very same government's thinly-veiled economic favoritism that the business groups from this ethnic group enjoyed. Such favoritism functioned to provoke or heighten anti-Chinese sentiments in the public, along with a sustained xenophobia, particularly against the imagined West.

In public discussions, the West and Chinese Indonesians were projected as being the main beneficiaries of the nation's economic growth and immoral excesses at the expense of the majority *pribumi*. Whenever political tension within the regime's inner circle heightened, or the nations' economy slowed, the government instigated anti-Chinese violence, which served three purposes. First, it diverted public outrage away from the ruling elite. Second, it ensured that the economically powerful ethnic minority, with no political representation in the government, continued to rely on the favors of individual state officials for protection, thus ensuring a continued increase of the extortion fee. Third, the same anti-Chinese cycle of orchestrated 'mass violence' provided the security apparatuses with a pretext for discrediting, detaining, or prosecuting any perceived oppositional figures, either from their own elite circles, or from the politically active *pribumi* community. These figures were accused of masterminding what appeared to be a racially motivated riot against Chinese Indonesians. Such a strategy might not convince everyone in

the nation. Under severe control by the state, the mass media had little choice but to amplify the official version of the news and their interpretation of this periodic mass violence.

It is important to note here that we are not dealing with a case of pure racist hatred and suppression. Rather, this is a case of paradoxical state management of ethnic politics, which has proven its effectiveness for decades under the New Order, and with a history that extends into the colonial period. Just as this minority was humiliated and blamed for bearing the marks of Chineseness, and thus being 'un-Indonesian', the New Order government actively manufactured and nurtured the stigmatized Chineseness, if only so it could be purged. Therefore, this is a case of '~~ethnicity~~' (under erasure) par excellence. No matter how assimilated a Chinese-Indonesian, particularly a man, had been, the state apparatus would ensure that traces of their ethnic past be continuously brought to the surface for further discrimination.

In many important legal documents such as birth or marriage certificates, there was a special code number for those citizens with a Chinese ethnic background. Those who had dutifully complied with the official pressure to give up their Chinese names and adopted 'Indonesian' sounding alternatives still had to declare their old names when filling in forms. They had to present a certified document indicating their registered name change, thus distinguishing themselves from other citizens and rendering themselves subject to a series of extra requirements, both legal and illegal. A male citizen of 'Chinese' descent could marry a *pribumi* female and live like other *pribumi*s, but they, their children, and potentially all their descendants would continue to be labeled 'Chinese' by the logic of the New Order state. Chineseness was a stigma considered hereditary and permanent, following the male's presumed static, fixed originary stigma. Things have altered slightly since the fall of the New Order in 1998, but old habits die hard.

Most accounts of the Chinese in Indonesia overemphasize either the repressive measures against them, or conversely, their economic power in proportion to its minority status within the nation.[7] Consequently,

[7] Just to mention one recent example, Tickell describes "under Suharto's New Order Chineseness was characterized more by a discursive absence rather than presence-by the unsaid rather than the said … Under the New Order Chinese ethnicity became unsayable and invisible" (2009: 276).

these accounts fail to recognize the fundamental links between seemingly contradictory features as a paradox that served excellently to maintain the status quo. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the wake of the fall of the New Order regime, most discussions (both journalistic and scholarly analyses) on the ethnic Chinese in the post-New Order period have been narrated primarily as a story of this group's liberation, recognition, empowerment, and revival of the oppressed. However, the highly problematic conception of ethnicity itself has remained unchallenged. Welcoming the new dawn of openness to discuss the fate of the Chinese ethnic in post-1998 Indonesia, Tickell regrets the uneven distribution of authors who enjoy this new liberty, on the basis of their ethnicity, either as Chinese Indonesians or *pribumi*. Tickell observes

> What is absent … is, however, the presentation of issues of contemporary importance to the Sino-Indonesian community by openly, self-identifying Sino-Indonesian authors … very little creative literature has been published by Indonesians of Chinese descent which specifically addresses the Sino-Indonesian experience …. Significantly it is a *pribumi* Indonesian author who poses these questions and implicitly with them other broad questions regarding the basis of national integration.
>
> (2009: 277, 289)

One is reminded of Anderson's point, already cited above; it is as if "everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions" (1991: 166). Furthermore, surely there is no reason why people of a certain 'ethnic background' should be the first or more productive than others in narrating or analyzing the ethnic politics that affect their own group. Tickell is surely not alone or the first to hold such a view, as I have discussed elsewhere (Heryanto 2008a: 78). A more recent publication on a related topic suggests that more artists from various backgrounds have addressed the theme (Setijadi-Dunn 2013); however, the old dualism (Chinese Indonesians/*pribumi* Indonesians) continues to persist.

In Chapter 3, I discussed at length the controversial work of film director Hanung Bramantyo. He appears to be in a position that defies the prevailing essentialist conception of ethnicity and the dualism (*pribumi*/non-*pribumi*) that it entails. He experienced first-hand the tyranny of ethnic and religious regimes in his own family life. His father and grandfather held prominent positions in Muhammadiyah, the nation's second largest Muslim organization, and yet he admits that

> I am half-Chinese through my mother, who converted to Islam. When I was younger, my mother's family would come to Yogyakarta to pay their respects at Idul Fitri, and we would go to Salatiga at Christmas. That is pluralism at work.
>
> (Emond 2012)

Things have changed with time in his family as it has with the politics in his nation (*see* Chapters 2 and 3): "We don't do the trips anymore, and we sometimes don't even SMS our greetings .... If I wear a white robe, I am considered a good Muslim, but if I wear jeans, then I am a bad one" (Emond 2012).

Far from being fatally either a "Chinese Indonesian" or "*pribumi* Indonesian", Indonesians, like all other social beings, have multiple and complex identities. These identities are very fluid, and never fully fixed. Far from being a simple case of racially-motivated repression against this ethnic minority, the New Order was actively producing a set of stereotypes about Chinese Indonesians in various forms, media and genres, in order for them to be denounced and declared dangerous. This is a case of the active and multiple production of an ~~identity~~ in ways highly comparable to the construction of ~~Communists~~ during the reign of the New Order, or ~~Islam~~ in many parts of the world after 9/11. Such an act of producing something under erasure differs markedly from other acts of erasure, denial, suppression, or censorship. However, for curious reasons, such a general trend does not apply uniformly to Indonesian literature (*see* Heryanto 1997) or its cinematic works (*see* Sen 2006), as will be examined further in the next section.

Indispensable, But Unwanted

The role of the ethnic Chinese in the early days of filmmaking and their specific contribution to the cinema industry in what is now Indonesia has recently become an issue of increased interest among scholars. What prompted the debate was not an outright denial or an oversight of their prominent role in the film industry. In fact, accounts in Indonesia of the early developments of the nation's cinema give due acknowledgement of the work of this ethnic group, as well as those of part European descent. What has been an issue is whether or not the work of those people counts as part of the national cultural heritage or its antecedent. At the time of writing, all published works in Indonesian that I managed to collect invariably declare that those works are not part of the history of

the national film. We will probe into this question deeper in the next section. In this section we will look at a related issue: the near total absence of ethnic Chinese characters in the hundreds of Indonesian films,[8] most of which were produced by this ethnic group.

Krishna Sen, one of the pioneers of scholarly work in English in this field, articulates the enigma succinctly. On the one hand, she reminds us that "Chinese immigrants had laid the foundations of the Indonesian film industry in the 1930s and Chinese finance remained the backbone of the film industry throughout most of its history" (Sen 2006: 171). She adds that this ethnic minority supplied not only

> producers, financiers and distributors but also as the creative fount of cinema as directors and cameramen … [and yet, ironically] Chinese Indonesians are rarely present as the subject matter of film texts even before their absence is effectively mandated by government policy under the New Order.
>
> (Sen 2006: 171)

Having viewed approximately 200 Indonesian films during the New Order period (plus many more that she has read about), she found only one title (namely *Putri Giok*, 1980) that shows a Chinese Indonesian family. However, this family appears on screen only to be stigmatized as a problem to the nation that needs to be put under erasure, in keeping with the New Orders' propaganda of 'assimilation' (Sen 2006: 177).[9] This almost total absence continued well until the collapse of the New Order in 1998, although this ethnic minority was a dominant topic in public discussion (largely as a major national 'problem') across all other

[8] However, in line with the paradoxical nature of the New Order policy of managing this ethnic minority, during the 1970s the same government allowed a high level of imported films in Mandarin (see *Tempo* 2012b: 18)

[9] Apparently, the cinematic enigma is not peculiar to Indonesia, but it also can be found in Malaysia for most of the middle of the twentieth century. At least this is the case with the films by and starring P. Ramlee, "the best-known figure in Malay film, first as actor, then as screenwriter, director and romantic lead in a string of at least 64 feature-length films" (Kahn 2006: 127). According to Kahn, in Ramlee's films "the characters in these films are all ethnic Malays. Chinese and Indian Malayans are not stereotyped or racialised, they are quite simply absent. … non-Malays do not exist at all" (2006: 120). Ramlee was widely popular among the Malay-speaking world that covered what have now consisted of separate nation-states of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia. One recent Indonesian commercial film *Koper* (2006, Oh) features an Indonesian lead character who collects Ramlee's music records.

genres and media, including television talk shows, news, and entertainment, including soap operas.

In order to have a sense of the complex and paradoxical position of ethnic Chinese individuals in the Indonesian cinema industry, Krishna Sen's analysis of the work and politics of Teguh Karya is highly instructive. Teguh Karya is one of the towering figures in contemporary Indonesian cinema, "the pre-eminent nationalist auteur-director of his generation" (Sen 2006: 172) and a citizen of Chinese descent or a non-*pribumi*. Back in 1996, one of Indonesia's most senior film critics J.B. Kristanto pondered why all Teguh Karya's films presented a gloomy view of the world (Kristanto 1996). Kristanto called for a serious investigation into this area. As if to take on the task, Sen's analysis of the filmmaker a decade later provides a key to answering Kristanto's question. Sen points to something intriguing about Karya: "[o]n the one hand, Teguh Karya (ethnic Chinese) has auteur/guru/star status in the annals of New Order cinema, and on the other, there is not a single Chinese character across the body of his work" (2006: 171). One of the most fascinating observations that Sen includes in her study refers to her initial contact, in person, with the filmmaker. It is so instructive to the concerns of this chapter that it deserves to be cited at length:

> When I went to interview Teguh Karya for the first time, as a postgraduate student in 1979 (I had just arrived to do my fieldwork), he had just finished *November 1828* … With characteristic warmth he drew me into the 'Teater Populer' family. Within hours, a young woman on the periphery of the group had whispered to me 'you know he is Chinese. But don't ask him anything about it' (or words to that effect). Over the next few weeks many people inside and outside his immediate circle repeated pretty much those words. I realized quickly, everyone knew Teguh was 'Chinese', that you could only whisper this, but more than that, everyone compulsively seemed to whisper this. The whisper had a peculiar public manifestation in that the print media would often put a bracketed (Steve Lim) next to his name, Teguh Karya! Reading his ten-page 'autobiography', it seemed to me that when he finally mentions his Chinese heritage in his own writing, in 1993, he reproduces the same hushed mention of his Chineseness that I had heard so many times before—a heritage acknowledged only to be immediately downgraded as unimportant.
>
> (Sen 2006: 178)

Despite his characteristically soft-spoken manner, his overall appearance of being fully dedicated to the finest details of artistic innovation, and

his disinterest in the politics of the day, Teguh Karya seemed to convey in very subtle ways a particular political stance on the issue of race. Having conducted a close analysis of Teguh Karya's cinematic works, Sen reached the following conclusion:

> In the nation that Teguh Karya's film constructs, there seems to be no place for the sons of foreign fathers and indigenous mothers .... Every one of his overtly nationalist films is also an indictment of a system that refused full citizenship to those of Chinese descent and simultaneously denied them a place to explore their Chineseness.
>
> (2006: 180)

It appears that such subtle criticism was easily lost in the public reception of his films at a time when (under the explicitly racist rhetoric of the New Order), a general attack against the position of the Chinese film producers was very explicit, and occasionally vulgarly racist. This muted group was blamed for the prevailing sleazy features of the domestic films. Critics, along with the small elite circles of the country's intelligentsia, made a fierce criticism of the domestic film's content, from their moral high grounds: excessive presentations of the luxurious lifestyles of the country's new rich, accompanied by vulgar scenes of violence and sex. Such grievances found expression, for instance, in the special issue on "pop culture" in the then most prestigious journal *Prisma* (No. 6/June 1977). Interestingly, while the film directors and critics enjoyed abundant space in the journal to launch their attacks against the film producers as alleged culprits of the nation's cultural and cinematic disaster, not a single voice from members of the accused group was represented in the same issue. Nearly all the authors of the articles and the filmmakers interviewed in this publication described the producers as possessing low standards and bad cultural taste. In turn, this bad taste was attributed to the ethnic background of the producers, namely being 'Chinese'. In contrast to the individual filmmakers from *pribumi* ethnic backgrounds who enjoyed complimentary remarks as individuals (with their actual names mentioned), not a single Chinese film producer was considered praiseworthy; their personal or company names were never mentioned. The latter were simply seen as one homogenous group, marked by their race. Such a discussion, involving some of the nation's most respected intellectuals and critics, is strongly reminiscent of the New Order's policy on issues specific to the Chinese minority: their economic investment is needed and welcome, but not their presence in the national body politic or their voice.

Two critical considerations are missing in such a discussion, as the *Prisma* publication illustrates. First, while an ethnic minority with a politically pariah status was blamed for the poor quality of the films directed by these filmmakers who criticized them, except a couple of comments (each running half a sentence or so), there was no serious mention, let alone condemnation, of the wide-ranging state repressions and heavy-handed state censorship and intervention in the process of all film production during the period. In other words, such discussion took place as if the Indonesian film industry operated fairly in a liberal and friendly, free-market environment. It was as if the producers with allegedly bad cultural taste were seeking a maximum profit from their venture by exploiting vulgar scenes of sex and violence at their discretion without state control, intervention or supervision. The reality was precisely the opposite: production of film suffered most severely from wide-ranging restrictions placed on it by the New Order government.[10] So it should not be a surprise that "[t]he scenario of a film requires approval … before shooting can start. At the completion of the shooting, the rush copy (unedited prints) needs to be submitted" (Sen 1994: 66). From the early 1970s, the Board of Film Censors was dominated by state officials, rather than artists or social interest groups. In 1979, "[g]overnment departments … made up more than two-thirds of the [Board], over a third of those from its security arm" (Sen 1994: 69). Second, even if there exists some truth in the criticism of the ethnic Chinese producers, it would be seriously remiss not to take into account how the New Order regime had restricted the space for this ethnic minority to participate in public life.

Apart from the legendary filmmaker Usmar Ismail, Sjuman Djaya was a more contemporary film director who earned the highest praise in the 1977 *Prisma* publication. Sjuman Djaya was presented as the then living legend who personified the ideal figure, against which all Chinese film producers (no individuals with names are mentioned) were condemned. *Prisma* interviewed Sjuman Djaya in the same issue, and in the

[10] Although film production bore the worst brunt of the regime's surveillance and censorship, other media and artistic events suffered similar repressive measures. Until the mid-1980s, before the government issued licenses for members of the First Family to launch private television networks, there was only one and state-owned nation-wide television network (Televisi Republik Indonesia or TVRI). Under the New Order, a preview of text by security offices and prior approval from them was required for a public poetry reading.

course of the conversation he disparaged the Chinese Indonesian producers as petty bourgeoisie, because "they came from Shantung" (China). So, he opined, "How can we expect something cultural or artistic from such kind of people? They hailed from the low class of traders. They produce nothing but trash" (Djaya 1977: 42). In 1973, the Jakarta-based tabloid ran a news piece under the title "*Cukong-cukong Cina Hamburkan Uang untuk Matikan Perfilman Nasional*" ("Chinese Financiers Wasted Money to Kill Off the National Film") (*see* Mohamad 1980: 80 citing tabloid *Nusantara*, 19 September 1973). The title was taken from a statement by Sandy Suwardi, producer of the Nusantara Film company, who alleged that the Chinese Indonesian-owned cinemas conspired to kill off the domestic film by favoring imported films from the US and Hong Kong.

Things began to change dramatically from the early 2000s, in the wake of the downfall of the New Order regime. A number of feature-length films broke new ground by addressing new themes. Before Islamic themed films were in vogue following the release of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008, Bramantyo) (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), a series of commercially produced films made conscious attempts to break the long-standing taboo of telling stories about Chinese Indonesians and the discomforting truths related to their status in contemporary Indonesian society. The release of *Ca-bau-kan* (2002, Dinata) and *Gie* (2005, Riza) have been generally celebrated as two pioneers in this area. To what extent these two films and the many others that followed suit manage to challenge and subvert the dominant views remains open to debate among analysts (Sen 2006; Setijadi-Dunn 2013; Tickell 2009). On this issue, I have offered my own assessments elsewhere (*see* Heryanto 2008a). Now I wish to return to where this section begins, namely with Sen's discussion of Teguh Karya, and add one additional point about Hanung Bramantyo.

In Chapter 3, I have shown the highly controversial path that Hanung Bramantyo boldly took to engage with the sensitive issue of Islamic politics in the new century. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned Hanung's claim for being half-Chinese through his mother, and his discomfort with the way the politics of faith has been pursued by state officials and social organizations in his country. In many accounts of his biography and career development, there is usually a reference to Bramantyo's experience in 1995–96 as a junior intern with Teguh Karya's Teater Populer company. An aspiration to become a professional actor brought Bramantyo to Jakarta where he joined the theatre company. However, his interaction with Teguh Karya, and close observation of how

Karya directed his film *Perkawinan Siti Zubaidah* (released as television drama in 1997) led him to change his mind and develop a passionate interest in becoming a film director. In 1996 he left Teater Populer and enrolled in Film Studies at the Jakarta Institute of the Arts. But as we have seen in the foregoing discussion, in contrast to his soft-spoken and a seemingly apolitical mentor Karya, Bramantyo took issue with the political correctness of the day, overtly challenging the way religion and ethnicity had been politicized in his country.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in his film with a title that consists of only a question mark *?* (2011) Bramantyo pushed his controversial stance to the farthest limits yet tolerated by the conservative groups. In this film, he demonstrated the possibility for and desirability of interethnic and interreligious marriages, interreligious conversions, and multireligious coexistence in Indonesia.[11] For outsiders unfamiliar with this history, it can be difficult to understand the extent to which such social relationships were politically sensitive. Conversely, it may be surprising for younger Indonesians to know that such transethnic and multireligious interactions were commonplace a century ago in society. This is one of several critical areas that have been heavily censored or skewed in the official history of the late colonial period and the early years of independence. The same erasure has been partly responsible for the extended hostility toward the work of the ethnic Chinese minority in the formation of the cinema industry in the archipelago. The next section will be devoted to addressing this blind spot.

The Beginning

At the Convention of National Film Council on 11 October 1962, participants declared that the history of the Indonesian national film began with the first shooting of *Darah dan Doa* (literally *Blood and Prayer*), also known as *Long March of Siliwangi* on 30 March 1950. Film director Usmar Ismail (1921–71) was also named the founding father of the national film, along with the less celebrated Djamaludin Malik (1917–70). Although Indonesia started commemorating National Film Day on

[11] In this regard, the film *?* is reminiscent of the work of the late Malaysian film director Yasmin Ahmad (1958–2009). In comparison to Indonesia, Malaysia has a longer history of a legally protected rigid demarcation of ethnic and religious differences.

30 March the following year in 1963, it would be another 37 years before all points decided on at the 1962 convention were made official by a Presidential Decree in 1999; it was signed by the interim President B.J. Habibie, not long after President Suharto resigned.

To date, no one in Indonesia seems to have challenged such an official history. It has been widely accepted in today's Indonesia, and is continually reproduced in various forms, despite the equally widespread awareness that film production, screenings and film criticism had been going on in this society for the previous three decades. All production before 1950 has been acknowledged as having existed, but they are discounted, and not just because of Indonesia's self-declared independence in 1945, and its later international recognition in 1949. Rather, according to the proponents of the official history, *Darah dan Doa* is considered to be a break from all other preceding titles by virtue of it having the attributes of true 'Indonesianness' in spirit and character (Purs 2013). However, there is not yet a clear and widely accepted definition of this 'Indonesianness'. No one in Indonesia has seriously questioned the vagueness publicly. Neither has anyone attempted to reconcile the contradictions between their retroactive valorization of Ismail's supposedly authentic Indonesianness and the claim that he had subscribed to Italian neo-realism in his filmmaking. Ismail worked in the propaganda division of the occupying forces, when Indonesia was under the Japanese occupation, and he studied in the US in 1953. One analyst argues that Usmar Ismail's *Darah dan Doa* "is now more respected than it was in 1950" (Barker 2010: 13).

The general discussion on the birth of the national cinema usually alludes to fuzzy statements attributed to the film director Usmar Ismail, who reportedly had aspired to produce films that expressed the true character, spirit and living experience of Indonesians. Another and no less important point has been used to justify the official history of the national film, namely *Darah dan Doa* being the first film produced and directed by 'true' Indonesians (i.e., 'indigenous' or *pribumi* Indonesians). All previous films are considered un-Indonesian, because those who took the leading roles in their production were of full or partial 'European' or 'Chinese' descent. Not surprisingly, such assumptions embedded in history (what Indonesianness means and who are or are not Indonesians) have been critically questioned by an increasing number of scholars (including Indonesia-born scholars) interested in related topics. These scholarly works tend to be written in English and circulate mainly

outside Indonesia (e.g., Barker 2010; Sen 2006; Setijadi-Dunn and Barker 2010).[12]

Despite being buried in contemporary Indonesian literature, the leading roles and major contributions of the ethnic Chinese as well as Eurasians to the early developments of the screen culture have recently been unearthed by scholars in the performing arts (*see* Cohen 2006, 2009; Winet 2010) and photography (Strassler 2008) in the Dutch East Indies period. All of these are part of a longer history and broader field of study. Several decades earlier researchers had discovered the prominent role of the ethnic Chinese in the fields of print media, language, and literature (*see* Damono 1984; Heryanto 1987, 1995; Rosidi 1967; Salmon 1981; Siregar 1964; Sumardjo 1981, 1983, 1985, 1986; Tickell 1987; Toer 1982, 1985, 1987; Watson 1971). Altogether, all these works directly and fundamentally confront the prevailing but false view in Indonesia about the 'foreignness' of the ethnic Chinese minority to Indonesia nationhood, and the presumed exclusive social life in the later years of colonialism and early years of decolonization. By implication, they also challenge the widely held understanding in Indonesia about the very birth of the nation, by subverting the ethno-nationalist illusion of Indonesia's authentic identity, both being separable from, or simply having fallen victim to, the European colonizing power.

Outsiders can easily see Indonesia as a nation whose land and territory, language and culture, state and laws are all products of the Dutch colonization (Anderson 1999; Cribb 1999). However, most contemporary Indonesians, especially those who grew up under the fascist New Order regime, have accepted the official history that portrayed the nation's existence many centuries prior to the arrival of the European forces. There is generally little or no inkling that their much-loved nation is a product of a particular and recent history, with external forces (the nation's enemies) being most responsible for its early existence in the early decades of the twentieth century. Instead, they like to believe that European colonialism was fundamentally a temporary period of unwelcome interruption to the nation's integrity, sovereignty and pre-destined progress.[13]

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[12] Due to my own limitations, I only consult works in Indonesian and English.

[13] In that sense, Indonesian nationalists are not that different from their counterparts elsewhere, at least as one analyst argues: "If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, more important, glide into a limitless future (Anderson 1983: 19).

"Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation", Ernest Renan (1990: 11) argued. Part of the history of the Dutch colonization and the early years of independence that the contemporary Indonesian nationalists prefer to forget is the complex, culturally rich, cosmopolitan-aspired modern, and trans-ethnic engagements of everyday life then. Within such a vibrant social life, the contributions of the ethnic Chinese was only a part—albeit a prominent one—along with and in deep collaboration with the colonial population of various other backgrounds, European, Asian, and indigenous alike. In one way or another, the different ethnic groups all took part in the running and reproducing, as well as undoing and challenging the colonial order.

In contrast, the Indonesian official history projects an imagined social order, clearly and strictly divided by race. It presents a simplistic narrative of the poor 'Indonesians' being assaulted and exploited by non-Indonesians (both Europeans and other fellow Asians such as the ethnic Chinese), before they managed to revolt and gain their freedom. Ironically, this sort of historiography is a clumsy attempt to reproduce the widely familiar but widely misunderstood colonial mentality and strategy of divide and rule, but only in a reversed hierarchy, with the natives being the valorized victims.

For nearly a century, the idea that the Dutch colonial society was divided into three racially-based categories (Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and natives)—each with different rights and privileges, reflecting the colonial social hierarchy—has been dominant amongst most Indonesians and foreign analysts alike. Anti-Chinese hostility in contemporary Indonesia has been rationalized or justified on the basis of a poorly understood history of inequality and the native's victimhood. Coppel's research (1999) presents a more nuanced and corrective account. Central to his analysis are two findings that are critically relevant to this chapter. First, the race-based division in the colonial laws (Constitutional Regulation of 1854) consisted of two, not three, categories of subjects: "Europeans and those equated (*gelijkgestelde*) with Europeans" and "the Natives and those equated (*gelijkgestelde*) with them", including Chinese, Arabs, Japanese and other (Coppel 1999: 34). Second, far from being reinforced effectively or consistently, the legislation was an object of criticism from both within and outside the colonial apparatus, so much so that it underwent repeated modifications. The third category Foreign Orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*) was in fact a product of one such legal battle; it only

became a more stable category very late in Dutch colonial rule (in the early 1930s). This third category was a partial exception to the general rule to make it possible for "all Foreign Orientals in Java" to enjoy the application of "the European Civil and Commercial Code while leaving them under the customary law [*adat*] in other matters … The exception was designed to protect European business interests against insolvent Chinese, not to raise the status of the Chinese as a group" (Coppel 1999: 34). One of Coppel's conclusions is most important to our discussion in this chapter:

> Despite these and other departures from the dualistic classification set out in 1854, at the end of the century the category of 'Foreign Orientals' was still legally a subset of those equated to 'Natives' rather than a third category intermediate to those of 'Europeans' and 'Natives'.
>
> (1999: 34–5)

Karen Strassler's (2008) brilliant study of amateurs and studio photographers in Java offers three highly instructive insights. *First*, although ethnic Chinese were numerically dominant, those who actively participated in the development of both types of photography in the late colonial period and early years of independence were engaged in interethnic collaboration "in the project of nation making, rendering visible the cosmopolitan origins of national formations" (Strassler 2008: 395). Even among those with an ethnic Chinese background, there was a greater "internal" diversity among them than the well-documented dualism of *totok* (full-blooded Chinese persons with a strong orientation to China) and *peranakan* (acculturated to local culture in Indonesia) (Strassler 2008: 398). *Second*, Strassler notes that amateur and studio photography expressed two distinct and competing strands of Indonesian nationalism. Amateur photography asserted "a nostalgic ideology of the *asli*" (authentic, original, or indigenous), while studio photography articulated "an outward-looking vision of Indonesia as a location from which to participate in global modernity" (Strassler 2008: 395). As we have seen in the foregoing, it is the former type of nationalism that has prevailed in Indonesia since the middle of the twentieth century, ironically at the expense of the ethnic minority that was at the forefront of promoting it through amateur photography. *Third*, Strassler extends her argument about the significance of the two types of photographers not only as representatives of two differing visions of being Indonesian, but also two distinct class positions:

> That amateur visions tended toward nostalgia while studio photographers embraced a more futurist vision is also unsurprising when we consider that most amateurs owed their privileged status to a hierarchical colonial social structure that was in decline, whereas studio photographers were new immigrants who, like many of the Indonesian subjects they photographed, were determinedly upwardly mobile.
>
> (2008: 426)

In variation to Strassler's study, some of the staunchest advocates of "a nostalgic ideology" of indigenist nationalism since independence are not restricted to those who used to have a "privileged status to a hierarchical colonial social structure that was in decline". On the contrary, a large portion of them are now members of the new middle classes, having enjoyed a rapid and steady upward mobility in economic, political and cultural terms since independence. However, their upward mobility is not without limit and constraints. In today's Indonesia, they continue to be apprehensive when confronted by the globalized forces. Seen from the old colonial looking glass, these threatening forces appear like the old ghosts of 'Foreign Orientals' from the late colonial period as well as the 'new' Foreign West. A nostalgic sense of secluded 'nativism' offers a moral and ideological space of refuge, and protection from the ruthless competition of the global capitalist relations in the entertainment industry and beyond.

The history of national film in Indonesia is "the history of an elitist cultural agenda that has sought to define *film nasional* as legitimate culture over popular modes" (Barker 2010: 17). This elite consisted of a handful of filmmakers and intelligentsia who distinguished themselves from the masses who constituted the majority of the film viewing population. Surely, by no means is such elitist nationalism peculiar to Indonesia. It seems to be the norm, rather than the exception. It must also be noted that this official history is the product of recent efforts, most noticeably after 1960. In addition to the mass audience for films, those excluded from this narrative also include filmmakers and producers with 'wrong' ethnic backgrounds (Eurasians or Chinese), or the wrong ideological or political orientation (particularly the Left in the middle of the century). To deny the work of the Left has been fairly easy, given the brutal destruction of any material from this period attributable to them, as well as the far-reaching overkill of any discussion of the work of the leftist artists from the middle of the twentieth century. In order to deny

or devalue the work of non-*pribumi* filmmakers, the old and familiar colonial racial categories were unashamedly revived and enhanced.

Although the Dutch colonial government might have aspired to imposing an apartheid-like legal system, dividing the population in the colony into two (or three) major categories, social life in the colony among people of various ethnic background was a lot more fluid and dynamic, crisscrossing the racial segregation that was often simplified or denied in many accounts. Yet, for the sake of its own ideological interest at the time, many Indonesian nationalist ideologues preferred to take the colonial administrations' desired division of races in the society as a reflection of reality, both past and present. Life in contemporary Indonesia is seen to consist of the fatally essentialist divisions between the West (now predominantly meaning the US instead of the Netherlands); ethnic Chinese, regardless of their legal citizenship (as non-*pribumi* instead of Foreign Orientals); and *pribumi* as the true Indonesians, by virtue of being the heirs of nation from their ancestors.[14] Such a frame of thought is clearly evident and consistent in nearly all accounts of the history of the Indonesian film industry.

One of the most senior and highly respected figures among Indonesian cinephiles in the past three decades is the late Misbach Y. Biran (1933–2012). His dedication to the study of Indonesian national film and film archiving is second to none. His writings on the history of Indonesian national film have become the main source of information for the general public. Unfortunately, the racialized colonial perspective prevails in most of his writings on the history of Indonesian films. It is a story of the good versus the bad (commercially driven versus artistic-oriented films and filmmakers) in line with the ethno-nationalist nativist propaganda. Biran dismissed the pioneering works of filmmakers in the first half of the twentieth century because they were produced by people with European or Chinese descent, and whose main motive was allegedly

[14] Anderson discussed how Indonesians, like many other nationalists, have "misunderstood" nationalism:

> too many Indonesians still inclined to think of Indonesia as an 'inheritance', not as a challenge nor as a common project. Where one has inheritances, one has inheritors, and too often bitter quarrels among them as to who has 'rights' to the inheritance: sometimes to the point of great violence. People who think that the 'abstract' Indonesia is an 'inheritance' to be preserved at all costs may end up doing terrible damage to the living citizens of that abstract geographical space.
>
> (1999: 4)

financial profit. Non-*pribumi* agents in film circles are identified almost exclusively in terms of their race, and almost exclusively in a negative light (exploitative, greedy and unethical), while the good *pribumi* individuals are glorified for their patriotism and presented as individuals with names and full-fledged biographies.

For a sense of the tone of Biran's account, the following quotes are from one of his published works in English:

> The viewing of film arrived in this country in 1900 as an initiative of Dutch people, and early screenings took place in rented buildings or as portable film shows. Film exhibition later became dominated by the Chinese. In 1925 the majority of cinemas were owned by Chinese.
>
> (2001: 211)

> … in 1928 the Chinese got involved in film production. At the beginning their main motive was to enhance their prestige. The Dutch still regarded the Chinese as of low status, and that was true in the eyes of the indigenous people as well, although the economic position of the ethnic Chinese was always superior to that of the indigenous people. The Chinese were seen as worshipping false idols, eating pork and regarding money as the most important thing.
>
> (2001: 213)

When the nationalist's hero (Usmar Ismail) comes up in his narrative, the hero appears as an actual individual with a name:

> Usmar's initiatives were not supported at the time by the predominating attitudes in the Indonesian film industry. Many of the films made in the Chinese studios … The circle of Chinese producers, who from the beginning had been primarily interested in making money, were not touched by the experience of the war and the revolution …. The films made by the Chinese studios that opened again after 1950 were not different from the films they had made in the early 1940s. They were merely entertainment films, and their contents contained no meaning.[15]
>
> (2001: 220)

[15] We will return to this point about films that allegedly "contained no meaning". The fact that some of these films attracted a sizable audience means that surely they must hold some meaning to those viewers, even if it did not please the taste of the elite then or in a later period.

Another local authority in the historiography of Indonesian national film is Salim Said. In some of the chapters in Salim Said's *Profil Dunia Film Indonesia* (1982), the issue of race is represented in a more nuanced manner, and individual non-*pribumi* filmmakers or producers are occasionally mentioned by name. However, the same fundamental nativist ideology that permeates his work is also represented in the history of Indonesian film more broadly in terms of the competition between two polarizing orientations, each represented by a race.[16]

> The Chinese's pioneering work in the field of film in Indonesia can be characterized primarily by their commercial purpose. As Foreign Orientals of that period, there is not much one can hope from them … After Indonesia gained independence, Usmar Ismail began a completely new tradition in Indonesian film. In contrast to the habits of the Chinese filmmakers, before or after the Wars, … Usmar Ismail produced films with stories based on real life around him that inspired him. Thus, the Indonesian face can be seen in these films from the hand of Usmar and his friends …
>
> (Said 1982: 6–7)

It is worthy to note an irony that belies the split among filmmakers along racial lines as imagined in contemporary Indonesia. Usmar Ismail's *Darah dan Doa* (inaugurated as the beginning of an ethno-nationalist film history by virtue of it departing from the preceding practice dominated by the ethnic Chinese) "was only completed with financial aid from a Chinese cinema owner, Tong Kim Mew" (Barker 2010: 11), a point noted earlier by Said (1982: 51). Furthermore, Djamaludin Malik (regarded as Ismail's co-founder of the national film) conspicuously complicated the crude racial stereotypes that construct the narrative of Indonesian national film, because Malik had consistently pursued commercial interests in his work. His ethnic background saves him, and his commercialism is forgiven (Barker 2010: 10). Even Usmar Ismail had not dedicated all his energy to artistic innovation or nationalist cause at the expense of financial accountability, as his contemporary admirers seem to have wanted the nation to believe. Like most other film directors anywhere, including those mentioned in this chapter, Ismail's creative

[16] Interestingly, when Salim Said moves from a broad overview of the history of the Indonesian film and zooms in to specific historical events of interest, the details are rich and interesting, and they often belie the simple racial dichotomy referred to in the preceding chapters of his book. In such micro level discussions, non-*pribumi* agents appear as real persons with names and admirable achievements.

activities fluctuated between artistic experimentations and commercial projects.

Therefore, it is highly likely that Ismail saw nothing unusual in getting "financial aid from a Chinese cinema owner" to complete his *Darah dan Doa*. One would even wonder if Ismail was even conscious of Tong's ethnicity, and conversely, Tong of Ismail's. There are reasons to doubt whether the ethnic difference between them held any significance, or was as great as what the contemporary Indonesian nationalist ideologues suggested, given the long-term engagements of Ismail and most other people during that period in this business with people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The peculiarity of racist-consciousness in contemporary Indonesia can be seen further in Biran's discussion of Teguh Karya. Presumably because Karya defied all the stereotypes of the Chinese as economic animals, his Chinese ancestry has been glossed over, or mentioned only in private whispers as Krishna Sen noted. When Karya found himself in a financial position comparable to that of Usmar Ismail, the ethnicity of his 'Chinese' friends—and only the ethnicity of this group of people—who came to assist him was once again emphasized:

> With the financial help of Chinese producer friends, Teguh embarked on a more commercial film, *Cinta Pertama* ('First Love', 1973), which introduced Christine Hakim to the screen and paired her for the first time with Slamet Rahardjo. This film was very successful at the box office.
>
> (Biran 2001: 234)

The deeply cosmopolitan spirit and interethnic intimacy among creative workers in the film industry was not unique to Ismail's circle. According to Krishna Sen "the first indigenous Indonesian directors—Raden Arieffin, Anjar Asmara, Suska, Inoe Perbatasari and Mohammad Said—all trained within an industry that was funded and culturally led by Chinese migrants" (Sen 2006: 173).[17] Anjar Asmara's 1955 essay on "The Future of

[17] In the neighbouring Malaya, an interethnic collaboration was also common, if with a recurring division of labour. Joel Kahn notes, "[i]n the 1950s the typical pattern was for films to be produced by Chinese capital (Shaw Brothers), directed by Indians, with Malay-ised version of Indian and Chinese plots, and acted by Malays speaking in Malay. This formula proved commercially successful, and it was into this structure that Ramlee himself was slotted. His first 25 films were produced between 1948 and 1955 by MFB (Malayan Film Board, the Malay film-making arm of Shaw Brothers) with a series of Indian directors including B.S. Rjahans, L. Krishnan, S. Ramanathan, K.M. Basker, and B.S. Rao" (Kahn 2006: 128).

Indonesian Film" is overly spirited and optimistic, without the slightest apprehension or grievances about problems created by any particular ethnic or racial group in his society. So much so that one gets the impression that the film industry that Asmara participated in is completely different from the one Biran and Said separately describe. Instead of expressing a commitment to or hope for strongly or uniquely "Indonesian" films, Asmara articulates his vision in five key areas, including finding a formula of production that would appeal to all sections of the population. Instead of criticizing the existing producers for being economically narrow-minded, Asmara spoke very highly and proudly of the producers in his society. Comparing them with their counterparts from Malaya, Asmara remarked, "blessed are the Indonesian film producers, because they are richly endowed with materials which are much more lively, warmer and spirited". The contrast between his vision and those who write about him in contemporary Indonesia could not be greater than when he discussed his argument that "other than as an art work, we must see film as a business entity. Purely commerce". In the same amicable fashion Usmar Ismail expressed

> praise for Dr. Huyung, … and for Basuki Effendi, a LEKRA filmmaker, amongst others, after 1965 these figures are almost entirely erased from film history. Dr. Huyung, who was actually Korean born, suggests a film history that is complicated and transnational, and therefore a challenge to insular ethno-nationalism.
>
> (Barker 2010: 10)

To return to Biran's statement cited above to the effect that the "films made by the Chinese studios" might have "no meaning" (2001: 220), it is important to note that *pribumi* people took part in the production of these movies from the 1930s, as viewers, actors and writers, and some of these films were meaningful to a fairly large segment of the population. For example, Salim Said mentioned the huge success of *Njai Dasima* (1929, *Lie*) that led to the production of its two sequels *Njai Dasima II* (1930, *Lie II*) and *Nancy Bikin Pembalesan* (*Njai Dasima III*) (1930, *Lie III*). Said quoted Biran, who attributed this success in part to the participation of "Indonesian people" (ethnically *pribumi*) as actors in those films. And they opined, the Chinese ethnic director had recruited these non-Chinese actors and mentioned this fact in the publicity of the films, thanks to the persuasion of Andjar Asmara, another *pribumi* (Said 1982: 20).

Hybridity Denied, But Prevails

There is indeed much to be reexamined in the official history of Indonesian national film, as with the history of the nation, which is currently full of stereotypes, oversimplification, great ellipses, and a strong colonialist frame of thought. Examining the case of the role of the Chinese Indonesian under erasure offers the benefit of a broader set of issues pertaining to the colonial regime's imperfect strategy of racial divide and rule, and the vibrant and cosmopolitan-aspiring work of interethnic artists, entrepreneurs and intellectuals in the formation of a new and modern nation. In analyzing such a process, the powerful fictiveness of ethnicity as a clear-cut social category has become apparent. By way of concluding the chapter, I wish to mention briefly what lies ahead in terms of analysis; I suggest the need for further research into this broad and complex issue, particularly the issue of social class.

Sen (2006) acknowledges that the cinematic presence of the Chinese ethnic minority has grown remarkably immediately following the collapse of the New Order regime, with new works produced by artists who come from outside the ethnic group. However, despite these new developments, Sen discovers that the old stereotypes of this ethnic group and the fundamental racist perspectives that underlie them survive well into the present.[18] But, as I indicated elsewhere (Heryanto 2008a), the more recent titles released after Sen published her article in 2006 demonstrate more heartening developments. More than simply showing a self-conscious tolerance to ethnic difference, young middle-class Indonesians

[18] Sen's criticism of *Ca-Bau-kan*, cited at length below, is illuminating. This is the first Indonesian film in more than half century that features a protagonist with some Chinese ancestry, and one that was intended to challenge the erasure or stigmatization of the ethnic group.

> The community of Chinese businessmen, whose machinations … take up most of the first half of the film, is universally corrupt, ruthless and rich, with little empathy with the Indonesian population and its nationalist aspirations. They sell out to the Japanese to advance their petty individual interests. There is nothing in this construction that departs from the common stereotype of the Chinese community as living in a simultaneously isolated and sexually and economically exploitative relationship with the majority indigenous population. There is not one Chinese character in the film (even including the hero) who is not corrupt, ruthless and rich. The *pribumi* by contrast are normalized across the social spectrum: the poor, the prostitutes, but also the incorruptible committed journalists, fearless young freedom fighters, the Javanese aristocrats.
>
> (Sen 2006: 181)

With some qualifications, my own analysis (Heryanto 2008a) reaffirms Sen's findings.

on and offscreen appear to be comfortable mixing with people of various ethnic, linguistic or national backgrounds; however, the gap between classes widened largely unnoticed. This new interethnic class solidarity was already apparent in the late 1990s (*see* Heryanto 1999b). Therefore, it is no surprise that the 1998 anti-Chinese pogrom generated a remarkable backlash, condemned by non-Chinese Indonesian middle class professionals who felt deeply ashamed (Aguilar Jr. 2001: 503). This does not mean racial prejudice or tension has disappeared once for all, as the public has since been preoccupied with interreligious conflicts (including those among inter-sects within the Muslim communities, *see* Chapter 2). However, it is safe to say that whilst racial tension has been pushed aside, it remains largely unresolved and can resurface and erupt whenever an effective trigger is present at the right moment in the future.

The first decade of the century also witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of feature films that set their story in regions hundreds of kilometers away from the capital city of Jakarta, and depict life in remote areas where people spoke in ethnic languages, hence requiring Indonesian subtitles for their release (Yuliawan 2012). However, the old stereotypes of good/bad and center/periphery persist (Darmawan 2012). I suggest that the possibility for a radical and effective critique of the colonial and essentialist-tainted perspectives in the Indonesian public over the issue required the ability of the general public to rediscover and recognize the fictiveness of ethnicity, and the rich, complex and rather messy social history of the Dutch East Indies in the early twentieth century that led to the birth of the Indonesian nation.

The ethno-nationalists chose Usmar Ismail to personify their elitist and nativist aspiration in direct opposition to what they see as the domination by non-*pribumi* in the film industry and what that allegedly represents, namely commercialism. But as noted earlier, during the most productive years of his career Ismail engaged in profit-driven film productions. Towards the end of his professional career, in the late 1960s, Ismail became the the first Indonesian to own a nightclub (Purs 2013), betraying the familiar racially-based dichotomy of *pribumi*/*non-pribumi* equals patriotism/commercialism. During the hype of the anti-Communist witch-hunt in the 1970s and 1980s, the erasure of the contribution of those labelled Leftist or Chinese heightened. This was also a period of economic growth and industrial expansion across the country, while the film industry enjoyed sustained growth that brought the work of several *pribumi* directors to prominence, including Ami Priyono, Sjuman Djaja,

Wim Umboh. However, each of these men, along with Teguh Karya, had significant links with either the Left or the so-called Chinese, or both (Sen 2006: 177). The long-running attempt to purge Indonesian film history from undesirable elements, and to invent or achieve a pure and authentic Indonesianness in national film has not been a success. Of course, the question is not when or whether such project will one day achieve its aims. Rather, the question is why some should have attempted it at all? As Setijadi-Dunn and Barker argue perceptively, by pursuing an exclusivist project—based on a narrow definition of who constitutes the genuine 'Indonesians', and by implication what constitutes Indonesian films—Indonesian ethno-nationalists have overlooked and undermined the richness of Indonesia's film history (2010: 25).

This chapter offers a critique of the notion of Indonesian film as understood officially as well as in the popular imagination. While this critique examines the indefensible attempt to deny and erase the roles and contributions of those labelled 'Europeans' or 'Chinese' in the making of the Indonesian film industry, it is not my intention to simply argue for bringing those excluded agencies back to their rightful place in the history of the nation and its film tradition. To do so would miss the whole point, and it would amount to recuperating the late colonial society with its racial division, an idea that has ironically seduced many Chinese Indonesians in the wake of the New Order collapse at the turn of the century and led them to a range of (re-)Sinicization activities. As I have discussed elsewhere (2008: 76–7, 90) as well as in the early sections of this chapter, a critical examination of the case of the Chinese Indonesian under erasure is one step towards recognizing a larger history under erasure. I refer to the history of a society during the final decades of Dutch colonialism that has been overlooked, forgotten or denied by the zealous nationalists in the country as well as some of its foreign analysts. It is a fascinating history of a social collective that underwent transformation towards modernity through a series of complex events, full of contradictions, excitements, hopes, as well as apprehensions, surprises and uncertainties. It was a history that produced a powerful fiction called ethnicity.

While the dynamics of that society are too complicated to be summed up here, I only wish to conclude the chapter by highlighting two points from the foregoing that are of primary relevance to the concerns of this chapter. First, the colonial society in the Dutch East Indies was many things, but it was not a society compartmentalized into three

categories along racial lines (Europeans, Foreign Orientals and Natives), as the colonial administration had wished, as well as the indigenist Indonesians and their analysts had imagined. Film production and consumption are two of the critical venues and formats in which the late colonial population experienced heightened sensations of industrial modernity, and cosmopolitan encounters involving people of various ethnic, lingual and cultural backgrounds, defying the fiction of race and legally sanctioned racial segregations. It is in this field that the significant and sustained contribution of those who bore the racial label 'Chinese' to the dynamics of modernity in the archipelago deserves to be appreciated. It is a contribution with imperfections but nonetheless critical to the formation of Indonesia as an independent nation-state.

Second, the formation of the Indonesian nation was both part of the process and product of a universal phenomenon throughout the European colonies across the globe. Conversely, a project for purifying Indonesia and Indonesian film, by purging it from its many enriching elements that have always been a constitutive force in its making, would be moral and historical self-mutilation, if not suicide. By denying the collective nature among those who share the aspirations to be equals and are committed to making the aspiration (or fiction) of nationhood into a reality, and by allowing some segments of this collective to retain their deluded entitlements to special privileges, a fatal disaster is almost inevitable. Unfortunately, as the previous chapters have shown, such tragic incidents have erupted too frequently, and at excessive scales. This and the four preceding chapters have demonstrated how Indonesians continue to struggle with some of the most divisive issues. In the next chapter, we will turn to the present and possible future as experienced by Indonesian youths and mediated by screen culture in the early decade of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 7

K-Pop and Gendered Asianization

The preceding chapters focus on cinema. In the subsequent two chapters, we will consider the dynamics of identity politics in the broader range of screen cultures, including those circulating via television, the internet and mobile devices. Relative to previous chapters, greater attention will be paid in this chapter to the agency of young women with urban middle-class backgrounds. In the next chapter, special attention will be directed to the lower classes in street politics. South Korean popular culture also known as the Korean wave will be frequently mentioned in the ensuing discussion. However, this chapter is not simply another contribution to the fast-growing scholarship on the Korean wave or its influence. Rather, it examines how young Indonesians adopt a position of agency, incorporating the popular cultures from South Korea and a few other neighboring countries in Northeast Asia. The music genre widely known as K-pop is an important part of all these cultural flows. For brevity and convenience, I took the liberty to refer to K-Pop in the chapter title and ensuing discussion as shorthand for the broader and admittedly diverse and complex phenomena of Korean wave.

It appears many Indonesians found the act of exploring and articulating a new identity as modern and cosmopolitan oriented Asians pleasurable, not least because of the constraints they had to face within their historically specific moral norms and political restrictions. At this current historical juncture, such aspirations intersect with a set of distinct but related identity politics: the decline of a strongly masculinist culture coincident with the fall of the militarist rule of the New Order, a nationwide desire to seek alternative models for being male and female in modern Indonesia (Clark 2010; Nilan 2009), an emboldened sense of liberty and interest among segments of the new middle class in pursuing global trends in consumerist culture (Gerke 2000; Heryanto 1999b; van

Leeuwen 2011), significantly mitigated racial tension against the ethnic Chinese minority (Chapter 6), and the rise of Islamization (Chapters 2 and 3).

This chapter builds on existing literature, and is substantially informed by fieldwork in 2009–11, involving participant observation of several events organized by fan groups, and interviews with several dozens of young women in cities in East and West Java. Most of the people my three assistants and I interviewed and observed were mostly female university students aged between 18 and 30; others were university graduates and early career professionals. At one public gathering organized by Korean popular music fans, one of my assistants interviewed a 77-year-old grandmother who attended the event with her teenage granddaughter. They were equally emotionally attached to their stars, and equally informed of news and updates about K-pop across the globe.

Some of the consumers of Northeast Asian popular culture interviewed for the study were working women who admitted that they found it increasingly difficult to find the time to keep in touch with their friends and still satisfy their desire to follow the latest television series or news about their favorite television stars. By contrast, the younger group of females—the group on which this study is focused—has abundant time, energy and extended local networks of fellow fans for establishing interest groups in their city of residence or broader transnational networks online, with whom they share notes, audio and video clips.

Despite their differences, the working women and the younger ones share characteristics that mark them as belonging to the so-called middle class: their university education, moderate purchasing power for entertainment, and transnational orientation in consumption and lifestyle. Many of the working women had previously been fans of the Northeast Asian popular culture during their student days. For this reason, closer examination of the activities and expressions of these highly mobile, energetic and younger groups is instructive for understanding the prevalent aspirations among segments of the middle classes, which have been targeted by the entertainment industry. Unlike the majority of working women, who enjoy the Korean dramas mostly in a small private circle, the younger fans deserve specific attention for their strongly communitarian urge to express their collective sentiments openly, both locally and transnationally.

More than simply organizing public gatherings among the converts, the young fans create a scene in public spaces during some of the busiest

times to demonstrate their newly adopted identity and celebrate their pleasure.[1] This goes far beyond the usual greeting scene of screaming at the sight of an artist's arrival at the airport or the auditorium for a performance, common among fans of pop idols in the West and the Rest. In particular, the most common forms of activities of K-pop fans early this century include singing contests (in Korean), cover dance contests (where they mimic the outfit, hairstyle, and choreography of their favorite groups in minute detail), or flash mob performances in shopping malls. Based on research on the Indonesian K-pop fans in 2010, Jung reports:

> The fans collaboratively re-create K-pop-related texts and images, then distribute their altered content .... Covering dance is one of the most common collaborative fan activities worldwide. The term cover usually means a version of a song sung by an artist different than the original singer. However, in the case of fan activities, cover refers to a version of a song or dance performed by fans .... In Thailand, some of the top cover teams dedicated to mimicking K-pop idol groups have gained YouTube fame and have become minor celebrities themselves.
>
> (2011: 4.2)

Such acts appear to be unprecedented in Indonesia, and probably elsewhere. "[I]n 2010, over 120 fan-operated K-pop-related events were held, including fan gatherings and Korean pop festivals and concerts" (Jung 2011: 2.2).[2]

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[1] Siriyuvasak and Shin describe similar phenomena across Asia as an "industry [that] has created ... male idols for young female consumption" (2007: 124). Like their Indonesian counterparts,

> Thai girls are no longer shy in expressing their sexual desire through their 'imaginary idol'. In reality, however, they are so shy that most of them cannot even dance along to the music. They never express themselves in any public arena except to greet their idols at the airport or at the concerts. Despite their shyness, it is truly extraordinary that Thai girls from a middle-class socio-economic background find liberation through K-pop and Asian-pop.
>
> (2007: 124)

[2] Fans of Michael Jackson or Beyoncé Knowles may be profoundly mesmerized by the artists' singing and dancing, but these fans are not predominantly of one gender. They do not organize a series of parties or contests of imitating the singing and dancing of their idols in public gatherings, on a regular basis, or upload video recordings of such activity on the internet.

Asianization

One of the broader contexts to the ensuing discussion is a heightened sense of 'Asianness'—a sphere broader and older than the recent K-pop mania—that has contributed to the expansion of interest among analysts. While K-pop emerged center stage during the time this book was being prepared, this chapter considers a slightly broader context that can be termed the 'Asianization of Asia', 'intra-/inter-Asia', or 'trans-Asian' moments (Chua 2004, 2008; Iwabuchi 2002a; Otmazgin 2007), referring loosely to the phenomenal interest among the Asia-born and bred in the social life of other parts of Asia. The notion of Asianization does not necessarily imply a self-conscious puritan project of localism or regionalism. A couple of students interviewed for this study responded firmly in the negative to the question of whether their love for K-pop had anything to do with their common Asian backgrounds. One of them was straightforward in arguing that they loved their favorite boy band, as opposed to other boy bands from other parts of Asia, because the band's music was "the best, and so was the band's performance on stage or video clips, and friendly communication with its fans". Other interviewees admitted that although they loved their Korean stars best, they also regularly enjoyed popular culture from Bollywood or local productions with Islamic overtones.

Instead of 'de-Westernizing' Asia in the strictest sense of the word, the process of Asianization involves a significant shift and refashioning of what were previously considered stereotypically Western cultural attributes. Increasingly more Asians, particularly the urban-based, young and well-educated who dominate public spaces, were shifting their fascination towards mass-mediated representations of already deeply westernized fellow Asians. Although there is no way of measuring it objectively or quantitatively, the increased popularity of Asian-looking or Asian-sounding cultural products in Asia correlates—whilst never exclusively, at least in part—to dominant global indicators and prescriptions of beauty and pleasure, which can trace their production largely back to the American entertainment industry.

In other words, elements of 'Western' popular culture are always already embedded in the social and cultural shifts referred to in this analysis as 'Asianization'. This shift does not represent a change from one monolithic entity to another. Rather, the notion of 'Asianization' refers to a shift in emphasis on selected elements within a highly hybrid and changing composite of transnational cultural flows. Therefore, as with

the powerful but problematic set of binaries discussed in the previous chapter ('Chinese' versus 'native' Indonesian), terms such as 'East' or 'Asian' and 'Western' in the ensuing discussion should not be taken to mean materially or physically objective entities, locations, persons, or attributes out there in the world. Rather, these are select semantic values that primarily make sense in contemporary languages. The so-called 'West', for instance, refers to multiple meanings about things and people in or from social life in the predominantly white segments of population on North America, Western Europe and Australia. For convenience, I will drop the quotation marks when using these words for the remainder of the chapter.

For the first time in a century, the West suddenly ceased to be the sole center of orientation for the consumption of popular culture in Indonesia, and perhaps more broadly in other parts of Asia. Certainly, American popular music and Hollywood films remain highly influential. However, they no longer hold exclusive dominant power, as they did for most of the previous century. In the same decade, often dubbed 'the Asian Century', we no longer hear of the dichotomy of 'East versus West' as the dominant discursive frame of thought or convenient trope in public discussion, suggesting a significant shift in transnational relations of power.[3] The significance of this discursive change cannot be overemphasized, especially when considering how the 'East versus West' dichotomy became key to much public discussion during most of the history of the decolonization of the region up to the end of the past century when leading politicians in Malaysia and Singapore advocated the essentialist idea of 'Asian values'.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, cross regional interchange in the production and consumption of modern forms of popular entertainment is not new to Southeast Asia or elsewhere. Hybridity characterizes much of the cultural production and consumption in the region, and dates back as early as the spread of modernity and technology that facilitated increased mobility and mechanical production of the entertainment industry itself in the later years of the nineteenth century. A small but increasing number of scholars have traced the genealogy of this fascinating subject matter—with a focus on what is now called Indonesia

[3] As suggested in Chapter 2, only among the militant Islamists and their main enemies in Washington, London, Jakarta or Canberra do we find the reincarnation of the 'East versus West' dichotomy as 'Islam versus the West' or various other derivatives.

—in the performing arts (Cohen 2006, 2009; Winet 2010), film (Biran 1976) and photography (Strassler 2008).

Indian popular music (David 2008) and film (Biran 1976) were popular during much of the middle of the twentieth century. Martial arts and historical films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China, as well as telenovellas from Latin America found a huge and avid audience in the region during the 1970s and 1980s, when Indonesia was under the New Order rule. In the following two decades, Japanese comics, toys, animated films, popular music and television dramas prevailed across Asia and beyond (Iwabuchi 2002a; Otmazgin 2007, 2008). They also mesmerized the first generation of Indonesians born after television networks transformed from being state-propaganda machines to a privately owned industry with a number of highly entertaining programs that appealed to a new and growing middle class, and thus advertisers, too. In the new millennium, the rapid popularity of Korean music, television dramas and video-games across the region (*see* Shim 2006; Shim, Heryanto and Siriyuvasak 2010; Siriyuvasak and Shin 2007) including Indonesia (*see* Merdikaningtyas 2006; Setijadi 2005), is only one of the more recent developments in the long history of cross-regional cultural flows.

Analysts have been fairly quick in responding to the rapid success of the entertainment industry from South Korea, especially in the neighboring Northeast Asia countries, although fandom in Southeast Asia can also be considered phenomenal. There are many studies on this recent transnational reception of East-Asian pop cultures in other Asian countries, which focus on the national capital cities and or most industrialized cities (e.g., Chua 2004; Otmazgin 2007; Siriyuvasak and Shin 2007). In contrast, a good portion of the analyses of Indonesia's situation examined cases outside Jakarta, and include more cultural centers and fewer industrialized cities. Ida conducted fieldwork in Surabaya (2008); Merdikaningtyas (2006) and Pravitta (2004) conducted theirs in Yogyakarta. While Setijadi (2005) included Jakarta-based respondents in her study, she also examined cases in Bandung and Medan. A review of existing literature on the subject is beyond the scope of this chapter, which focuses specifically on the significance of the agency of urbanized young women in contemporary Indonesia against three specific contexts: the sustained consolidation of the new middle classes, the century long history of anti-Chinese sentiments (*see* Chapter 6), and the recent and unprecedented rise of Islamization (*see* Chapter 2). Each of these contexts will be discussed in succession over the next three sections.

While the class position of the K-pop fans can be expected to be widely important across the region, local racial and religious issues to be discussed below distinguish the case of Indonesia (and presumably that in the neighboring Malaysia) from most other places in East Asia. Stereotypes, ethnically based or otherwise, are always a part of our daily lives across the globe. Although most people in Indonesia are fully aware that China, Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea are different nation-states, strangers in public spaces with an oriental look are usually identified as being of Chinese descent, with all the familiar stereotyped attributes commonly attached to them. Some of these attributes are being industrious, wealthy, strongly attached to their inner group, opportunistic, and lacking grace, good taste, and patriotism.[4] In the previous chapter, we have seen how local literature and cinema have challenged such stereotypes in tandem with greater advocacy for ethnic minorities and repealing racial discriminatory policies and laws. Nonetheless, it would be seriously remiss to underestimate the effect of recent popular culture from Northeast Asia in helping to mitigate these stereotypes. Unlike domestic products, significant cultural products from Northeast Asia have come to Indonesia in large and successive waves for over a decade, with the influx of numerous film titles, television dramas, and staged performance and music video clips that go viral on social media, and the wide availability of pirated DVDs in shopping malls and on the sidewalks of major cities.

In a sense, greater tolerance for the Chinese ethnic minority is not new to Indonesia's history. It bears similar markers to pre-1965 Indonesia, when racial tension was immanent but without the legal sanction from the state or inflammatory statements from state officials as frequently heard during the New Order rule. In contrast, the more remarkable K-pop related phenomenon can be observed among Muslim young people, especially young women. The majority of K-pop fans were born and

[4] Likewise, there exist different sets of stereotypes for all white-skinned people, or those with darker skin. It is highly common for Indonesians to refer to all white-skinned people as *Bule* (literally albino) or *Landa*, a short term for *Belanda* (Hollanders), the former colonizers. Attributes associated with them include being modern, rational, wealthy, Christian, liberal-minded, and individualistic. "The *Landa*s who exist in the popular mind are primarily those appearing in Hollywood movies and television soap operas. Their images are reproduced most visibly in advertisements, films and other entertainment industries" (Heryanto 1999b: 162).

raised during the height of Islamization, and so they have to reconcile what may appear to be the dissonant juxtaposition of opposites: religious piety with strict commitment to self-discipline and adherence to decorum on the one hand, and a global celebration of consumerist and worldly pleasure on the other. In Chapters 2 and 3, we have seen a similar trend, where cultural post-Islamism reconciles the commitment to being both a modernist Muslim with being a trendy and hip consumer of commodified lifestyles modeled after the West. What we see below is not entirely distinct, because the popular cultures from Northeast Asia heavily adopt and adapt elements from Western popular culture. Yet, there are several significant differences, which will be detailed below.

At face value, the influence of K-pop upon preexisting ethnic tensions appears to be unrelated to the unprecedented growth of cultural post-Islamization as I have argued in Chapter 2. What these two phenomena have in common are underlying changes in contemporary Indonesia, namely the consolidation-in-progress of the trans-ethnic (Chapter 6), urban middle classes, their cultural and moral aspirations, new work ethos and lifestyle. This process dates back several decades earlier as I have discussed elsewhere (Heryanto 1999b), with intermittent glitches, such as the racialized turmoil that erupted during the regime change in 1998 (*see* Chapter 6). This social change has been responsible for the growth of cultural post-Islamism (Chapters 2 and 3), and explains the enthusiastic embrace of the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008, Bramantyo). As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the film provides a long overdue representation of a widely-held aspiration in Indonesia at the turn of the century: to be an industrious Indonesian from a modest family background with an uncompromised Islamic piety and moral conscience, who is also a member of Asia's new middle class and equally at ease with the world of classical Islamic texts as with a Western-dominated global lifestyle and consumption. Whilst Indonesian cultural post-Islamism is equally popular between both genders, what distinguishes the ensuing discussion from the previous chapters on cultural post-Islamism is the agency of predominantly young women who assert themselves by occupying public space in response to K-pop.

Middle-Class Young Women

While the majority of K-pop fans are women, analysts have recognized significant differences in the patterns of reception and responses among these fans along age, professional or class lines. For instance, Yang's

(2008) study finds a contrast between working-class and well-educated middle-class women in Taiwan in their reception of, and response to, Korean television dramas. The former cherish the pedagogical values in filial piety and domestic labor depicted in the television dramas, while the latter watch the same programs purely for entertainment and pleasure, or for updated information on luxurious lifestyles and directions for consuming expensive goods. Elsewhere, Ida (2008) also discovers significant contrasts between the two classes of female viewers of the Taiwanese television series *Meteor Garden* (*see* below) in Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city.

Although South Korean popular products have dominated much of the spread of Northeast Asian popular culture from the early 2000s, products from several neighboring countries (Japan, China, and Taiwan) have also played a major part. Indeed, in Indonesia, and perhaps elsewhere, the first cultural product to become an unprecedented hit, and set in train a rapid cultural influx from Northeast Asia, is not Korean-made. I refer to the Taiwanese drama series *Meteor Garden* (*Liúxīng Huāyuán*) (2001). The transnational genealogy of *Meteor Garden* itself is instructive. Released in 2001, this series was based on award-winning Japanese manga *Hana Yori Dango* (1992) by Yoko Kamio. To date, no other commercial television drama has rivaled the commercial success of *Meteor Garden* in Indonesia. Its international success hastened its producers to prepare a sequel (*Meteor Garden II*) in 2003. It took another couple of years before the Japanese manga story found its Japanese version television series. Though neither of the two flopped in Indonesia, they were unable to emulate the popularity or commercial success of the first *Meteor Garden* series. It is telling that a Korean version of the series was not produced until 2009 under the title *Kkotbodanamja*, better known in English as *Boys Over Flowers*. By then, K-pop had come to dominate the market in the region, following the success in the preceding years of the four part series *Endless Love: Autumn in My Heart* (2000), *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Summer Scent* (2003) and *Spring Waltz* (2006), and *Full House* (2004).

In early 2003, the stars of *Meteor Garden* Jerry Yan, Vanness Wu, Ken Chu, and Vic Chou visited Jakarta as members of the boy band Flower Four, better known as F4. Their arrival excited a screaming mass of young women who welcomed them at the airport. This behavior attracted the attention of journalists and analysts alike, in part because most people had either not seen anything like that before or had not seen it for a long time. The scene at the airport was also controversial

because it occurred when the national mass media was preoccupied with debates about the public protests against the Megawati government's proposal to raise the price of electricity, fuel and telephone connections. In fact, there were mass rallies in the capital city of Jakarta on the day F4 arrived. Many commentators painted the two incidents in black and white, depicting the F4 fans as representative of the shamelessly pampered children of economically privileged groups who had no sensitivity to the plight of the nation's disadvantaged majority, with whom the more politically-conscious urban, middle-class activists and journalists demonstrated their strong support publicly, as part of a larger opposition to the government.

Elsewhere, I have discussed how middle-class-centric the controversy over the two contrasting events in Jakarta was (Heryanto 2010b: 227–8). That controversy failed to recognize another related event at the lower levels of the society, particularly in Java, which soon altered the public debate about the nation's integrity, morality and the performing arts industry. I refer to the 'Inul-mania' (after the *dangdut* performer Inul Daratista) that swept across economically disadvantaged parts of the population during the same period. In the middle of the year, the national media discovered her and transformed her into a cultural icon. Depending who one asked, Inul represented either a moral decadence that threatened the nation (especially as it underwent Islamization in earnest), or a new articulation (in the broader context of a post-authoritarian Indonesia) of an old tradition of celebrating female sexuality in several ethnic communities in the nation.

Inul stirred a moral panic that had to be suppressed. Her sensuality proved too raunchy for the cultural taste and moral sensibilities of the middle class, both in Indonesia and in neighboring countries. She simply did not belong to the world of *Meteor Garden*. As it became clear that she was too important to be overlooked, and too wild to be ignored, members of the nation's elite moved in to officially ban her performance in their provinces, while others proposed an anti-pornography law in the parliament. Debates about her took a radical twist when the entertainment industry identified the potential to make a massive profit by investing in her national television debut, and transformed her into a new pop star after she underwent a major facelift and a degree of domestication (for details, *see* Heryanto 2008b). To many urban middle-class young women, however, these political tussles were irrelevant to their primary concern, which was indulging in the pleasures of contemporary popular cultures from Northeast Asia.

As will be shown below, contrary to critics' dismissive portrayals disseminated widely in Indonesia in 2003, the most popular television dramas from Northeast Asia do not function exclusively to promote the pleasure of being passive consumers of luxury goods and a particular lifestyle. One prominent feature common to many of these television dramas is the depiction and valorization of a capitalist ethic of industriousness, diligence, and persistence, particularly among its young female protagonists who aspire to economic independence and gender equality. This feature is significantly absent from most popular films and television dramas in Indonesia. Although personal and economic achievement through higher education constitutes a dominant feature in many post-1998 Islamic films (*see* Chapters 2 and 3; Sasono 2010: 57), with very few exceptions, such aspirations nearly always belong to the male protagonist in a society that is clearly unequal along gender lines.

Meteor Garden tells a story of love between Shan Cai and Dao Ming Tse, with several complications and subplots of additional love stories involving other characters. The female protagonist Shan comes from an economically modest family background. A spoilt son of an extremely rich family, Dao is the leader of a much-feared high school student gang of four called "F4". The four are idolized as much as feared for their wealth, good looks, and bullish cruelty. The relationship between Shan and Dao is an extreme case of opposites attract. Despite their significant differences in wealth, Shan is as stubborn as Dao. Shan's name, as she tells the audience in one scene, means "weed not to be trampled on". In defense of her girlfriend who had previously caused some minor offence to Dao, which leads to a harsh response, Shan becomes an object of repeated bullying at the hands of F4 and other schoolmates who act on behalf of F4. Instead of accepting her fate and submitting to the assaults and humiliation, Shan single-handedly strikes back. In one scene, she punches Dao to the ground!

The storyline begins to twist and becomes more interesting when we learn later on that Dao has a crush on Shan. Apparently, her stubbornness is a source of her attractiveness. To his surprise, and that of everyone in the story, Shan rejects Dao's affections outright. This rejection deepens Dao's desire to conquer and possess Shan by any means, including a willingness to publicly shame himself and compromise his reputation as the toughest guy in the school. Eventually after many long and painful attempts, Dao wins Shan's heart. However, despite the couple's expressed mutual interest, their relationship is fraught with endless quarrels, which creates plenty of comic material for the audience. In any case, for the

duration of the Shan and Dao courtship, each maintains their pride and stubbornly represses their affections for the other.

Throughout the story, Shan maintains a persona as a hardworker, determined to maintain her own honor and that of her family's. To this end, she feels that she must refrain from easy gratification, especially when it comes as a result of her relationship with Dao. Although she eventually accepts Dao's affection, she is never interested in accepting his shower of gifts and the material benefits of dating him, despite his and her parents' insistence that she accept all the gifts. Such is the self-consciousness of her modest economic standing. The economic gap that distinguishes Dao and Shan becomes an increasingly thorny issue, as Dao's mother not only objects to Dao's relationship with her, but is also condescending towards Shan. While some elements of a Cinderella complex can be detected in this series, Shan remains an admirable female protagonist for her integrity and strong, uncompromising and confrontational nature, thus defying any simple parallel to Cinderella.

Like the Taiwan-produced *Meteor Garden*, which revolves around the daily life and youthful love of high school students, comic squabbles also dominate the romantic relationship between two equally stubborn adults in *Full House* (2004), another big hit from South Korea. Protagonists in both titles are strongly committed to hard work and self-restraint, denying their true feelings towards each other. In the other most popular South Korean tetralogy *Endless Love* (mentioned above), there is a very different tone of narration. Here, a combination of mellowness and melancholy dominate the storyline about heterosexual adults who express their mature and tender love in the most gentle fashion. Despite this, commonly salient in all the titles that have been widely regarded as the most popular titles within and outside Indonesia, is the remarkable self-restraint of the protagonists, along with presentations of luxurious lifestyles in select scenes. Nearly all the respondents interviewed for this study reconfirmed previous studies that the major attraction of these cultural products lies in the rendering of a mise-en-scène of an aesthetically pleasing natural and urban scenography, featuring good-looking actors and a trendy lifestyle.

Certainly there is neither a causal link nor a contradiction between the two different elements in these television series: a commitment to industriousness, diligence, and persistence, and a self-indulgent consumption of the abundant displays of comfort, elegance, and luxury exhibited in the lifestyles of the wealthy characters. The two are not necessarily

mutually exclusive, as the survival of capitalism is equally reliant on the endless propensity and balance of both productive and consumptive activities. Likewise, the two elements do not necessarily have causal links. Not all the industrious characters in these television dramas end up living in abundance. Not all who work hard do so with the intention of becoming wealthy. Not all who are wealthy appear to work harder than the less wealthy ones. Through these popular television dramas, we garner a strong sense of what it means for many young women to survive within the social pressures of a rapidly industrialized capitalist Asia. While comfortable lifestyles and romantic love are important and desirable, the real concerns in these television dramas lie elsewhere.

A love story is present in these Northeast Asian television drama narratives, and often provides the overall framework of the entire storyline. However, unlike Indonesian drama, a sentimental state of mind or expression does not take center stage. Instead, viewers are invited to follow the complex and exhausting struggle of the female protagonist's determination to overcome the various battles resulting from living in a strongly patriarchal culture as a second-class citizen due to gender, at a time when Asia is rapidly transforming itself into an industrialized capitalist society. Such challenges include a high level of competitiveness in the school or workplace; heavy pressure from the family (especially the older generation), the peer group and community; alongside negotiating older traditions and juggling relevant health issues. At the confluence of such diverse pressures from various contexts, the female protagonist demonstrates an admirable combination of strategies of survival and success: persistence, patience, self-restraint instead of an aggressive reaction. In her study of young Muslim women in Java, Smith-Hefner notes a remarkably new trend in Indonesia: 95 per cent prioritised job security and financial independence over marriage—the same aspiration expressed by their parents for their daughters (Smith-Hefner 2007: 412).

In many of these dramas, when a crisis reaches its peak and the protagonist finds herself in a state of extreme grief or anger, we often see long and silent scenes of motionless and speechless characters, rather than a burst of emotion as is often the case in more familiar Indonesian or Hollywood titles. It is apparent that a recurrent depiction of the female protagonist's dedicated aspiration and non-confrontational strategy has struck a chord with the majority of the urban middle-class female viewers in Indonesia and neighboring countries. Better still, more often than not, the series concludes on a happy note. The protagonist's hard

work, patience and persistence are rewarded, presumably for the pleasure of the audience. Gender egalitarianism, at a moderate level and continuing at a slow and gradual pace, looks like a real promise or glowing inspiration for those attached to the television dramas.

Certainly, hard work, persistence, and the desire for material reward are universal across capitalist societies, and have been presented as a given in fiction and nonfiction alike. What stands out in these Northeast Asian dramas is the recurrent denial or alternative articulation of their relationship to one another. Labor is not just a means to economic reward or independence; in fact there is no guarantee that the former will generate the latter. Instead, in these contemporary television dramas from Northeast Asia, hard work and self-restraint are presented as morally virtuous in their own right, instead of as a means for some reward to be gained immediately afterwards as entitlements. It is conceivable, to many real or potential Indonesian viewers, that the virtue of hard work and self-restraint has a religious basis too. In any case, this is a remarkable departure from the usual presentation in many narratives already familiar in other sources and periods, such as Hollywood, where hard work and a deliberate delay of gratification often appears as an unpleasant but necessary requirement for some sort of material reward to be rightfully earned at a later date.

It remains to be further investigated whether, and to what degree, urban middle-class young women have been deeply attracted to contemporary television dramas from Northeast Asia for the reasons I have suggested above. The question relates to the previous debate in the early 2000s over the so-called 'cultural proximity' thesis to explain why consumers of popular culture in Asia have shifted their allegiance from North America and Western Europe to these Northeast Asian products (*see* Setijadi 2005; Iwabuchi 2002a: 130–4; Otmazgin 2007). The debate is too complex for our immediate concerns here. Below I only wish to note a few preliminary observations in response. It may be worth reiterating that Asia is never a unitary entity that exists in isolation from the rest of the world. Critics of the cultural proximity thesis remind us that not all cultural products from one part of Asia are readily available or widely popular in some other parts of Asia. Lee (2009: 131–3) argues that K-pop has been popular not only in the Confucian-dominated region of Northeast Asia, but also in parts of Catholic-strong Latin America, as well as in Muslim-majority nations. Lee goes on to argue that even within the Confucian-dominated region of Northeast Asia, different aspects and elements of K-pop appeal to the population in different countries.

More importantly, more than a few Koreans themselves, as well as their analysts, do not think that K-pop represents Korean culture. Some of these products are even "anti-Confucian" (Shin 2009: 514). Like most products in contemporary popular culture industry, K-pop is highly hybrid and transnational. "For the agencies of many Korean stars the lack of distinctiveness has become a deliberate factor in marketing their products overseas" (Maliangkay 2010: 6).

On the other hand, it is curious why K-pop's popularity has been strongest in parts of Asia (North, Northeast and Southeast Asia) disproportionate to regions elsewhere. Attempts to market them in the US and other 'Western' societies have not been very successful (Choe and Russell 2012; Shin 2009).[5] So, at face value, the cultural proximity thesis has a point that cannot be immediately or wholly dismissed, but requires further qualification and modification. Critics of the cultural proximity thesis often take issue with the modifier 'cultural' than with the notion of 'proximity'. The thesis has a point if by 'culture' we refer to a contested field and a set of signifying practices in the world marked by unequal relations of power in both material and nonmaterial terms, instead of the old notion of culture as some static and unchanging system of values, world views, or ways of living belonging to a clearly bounded social group.

My own disquiet is with the basic logic of the cultural proximity thesis. The unfamiliar and distance can be a source of attraction, just as much as the familiar and the near have been throughout the history of popular culture. As already indicated earlier (and confirmed by many respondents we spoke with during fieldwork for this study), good-looking actors, fashionable hairdos, clothing, stylish houses, scenic panoramas, and fine dining are some of the many attractive points that have drawn in the fans of Northeast Asian television dramas. One could argue that they fascinate many viewers, precisely because they are not part of the everyday life of those viewers.[6] Yet, unlike their severely disadvantaged

[5] *See* also Iwabuchi (2002b) for the limited number of successful attempts to expand Japanese popular culture into the US market.

[6] Kim Seong-kon, a professor of English at Seoul National University, puts it in simple and yet perceptive terms: "K-pop is a mixture of two different cultures, Korean and Western. Perhaps it is this hybrid culture between the East and West that appeals to young people in other countries. They can easily embrace K-pop because its Western aspects are familiar to them already. At the same time, they are fascinated by the exotic, foreign elements that are also found in K-pop" (2012: 39).

fellow nationals, these urban middle-class youths know, or like to think, that such a lifestyle is not entirely beyond their reach in the near future.

For some, being dedicated fans of the K-pop can be financially challenging. On 27–29 April 2012 Super Junior (the most popular K-pop boy band in Indonesia) broke records performing three nights in a row at the venue in Jakarta. Each night, 8,000 tickets were sold, ranging from IDR 500,000 (USD 60) to IDR 2,000,000 (USD 223) (Tobing and Budiartie 2012: 69). The latter figure was higher than the minimum wage for the capital city (IDR 1,529,150), which was already double that in the country's poorer areas, and near the average monthly income of the nation.[7] More than a few rich Indonesians even travelled overseas to see the live performances of their idols (Sianipar 2010). In one gathering we visited, which was organized by and for fans of K-pop in Jakarta (June 2010), hundreds of participants responded enthusiastically to a survey from a major event organizer corporation asking which Korean groups they wished to visit Indonesia for live performances and the range of ticket prices they would be willing to pay to see such a performance. The majority answered the last question between IDR 200,000 (USD 23) to IDR 1,500,000 (USD 167).

Issues of cultural proximity may not go away entirely from future discussions among dedicated fans of K-pop or their analysts. Rather than probing the issue further, in the foregoing I have tried to highlight another question of no less importance, namely the class position of the fans. The class position is perhaps more significant than the degree of a fan's cultural or civilizational proximity to Northeast Asia. Regardless of how far and wide K-pop—or any other genre—prevails in the world market, it will be consumed and signified differently across their dedicated fan base for numerous reasons. Moving beyond class positions, in the next section I wish to explore how K-pop fans confronted the historically specific contexts of post-authoritarianism, the mitigated racial tension, and the rise of Islamism and post-Islamism.

[7] The Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (2013) estimates the Gross National Income of 2012 at IDR 30,516,670. According to The World Bank as of March 2013 "more than 32 million Indonesians currently live below the poverty line and approximately half of all households remain clustered around the national poverty line set at 200,262 rupiahs per month (USD 22)."

Hybridity Remix

In Chapter 2, I argued that both Islamism and post-Islamism experienced a momentum for growth to an unprecedented level, occurring in the wake of the downfall of the long-lasting military regime, which left a huge power vacuum in many areas, including the moral and cultural spheres. Could the same moment be responsible for the unprecedented demand for popular culture from Northeast Asia in Indonesia, as in the case of K-pop? Sun Jung (2011: 4.22) argues affirmatively, suggesting a parallelism in the major social and political changes taking place in China, Vietnam and Indonesia, and the subsequent cultural vacuum that ensued when K-pop arrived in each of these countries. From this perspective, she reads the widely popular cover dance among young fans in Indonesia as an "attempt to deconstruct normative gender representations, which in turn reinforces the construction of new Indonesian femininity" (Jung 2011: 4.18). While I find her point reasonable, I think the parallelism does not go much further. In this final section of the chapter, I wish to discuss further the historical specificities of the Indonesian case by looking at how K-pop fever encounters the legacy of New Order anti-Chinese sentiment and post-New Order Islamization.

During much of the past century, an oriental look or any of the other attributes of Chineseness have been considered a liability in public life in Indonesia. While most Indonesians recognize Chinese, Japanese, or South Korean nationals as distinct groups, such awareness tends to slip away in everyday life where prejudices often interfere with perceptions. Given the problematic presence of Chinese Indonesians in national politics, it is easy for many to identify or assume that any oriental-looking stranger in public space or in the mass media is Chinese. Until the downfall of the New Order in 1998, ideograph writings were barely visible. As discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese language and characters were illegal. Chinese Indonesians barely appeared as characters in domestically produced fiction (*see* Chapter 6). In the rare occasions they appeared on television programs and films, they were little more than crude caricatures. All has changed in the first decade of this century, not only evidenced by the state-sanctioned celebration of the Chinese New Year every year after the fall of the New Order government (*see* Chapter 6), but also by the daily influx of Japanese, Taiwanese and South Korean popular cultures.

In the early years of the New Order rule, citizens of Chinese descents were pressured to give up their personal names, and paid the fees

to legally apply for more 'Indonesian-sounding' names, only to be further discriminated against when accessing public services. Half a century later, many young Indonesian K-pop fans of various ethnic backgrounds have voluntarily taken on Korean names, albeit for informal purposes. Many of them, including some we interviewed for this study, write their Korean names in Korean orthography. One girl of Chinese ethnicity explained that she chose her Korean name because of the similarities between the Chinese characters in her name with that in Korean orthography. In the new liberal environment of the post-New Order, Mandarin courses have mushroomed in tandem with Korean ones. While the former has had a long history before the New Order period, the latter is a novelty, along with the mass demand for Korean cuisine, interest in Korean traditional dress as well as contemporary fashion, and popularity of South Korea as a tourist destination.

During the initial influx of Northeast Asian popular culture, young female fans in Indonesia were surprised by their perception of Oriental-looking males, commenting on how it had altered. For example, in one study some of these female fans admitted they were surprised when they found themselves adoring the protagonist Dao Ming Tse (played by Jerry Yan) in *Meteor Garden*: "one does not usually find a good-looking man in a Mandarin film" (Pravitta 2004–5: 7). Two respondents in the same study said they did not expect that oriental features and good looks could go together. Pravitta's observation is worth quoting at length:

> Their infatuation with Dao Ming Tse changed not only their subsequent choice of films to watch, but also altered how their own perceptions of what they considered to be attractive in a male. It was not long ago when *pribumi* [indigenous] Indonesians remained at some distance from Indonesians of Chinese descent in daily life, let alone when courting. It was extremely rare to find a *pribumi* who dated an ethnic Chinese. Likewise, it was extremely rare to hear a female *pribumi* who would consider a male of ethnic Chinese descent good-looking, or cool. However, after the *Meteor Garden* fever, things changed. Female university students took pleasure in the gazing at males of Chinese descent, and they invented new idioms such as *cica* (*cina cakep*) [good-looking Chinese], *cihuy* (*cina uhuy*) [cool Chinese].
>
> (2004–5: 18–9)

For more than a century, Caucasian- or Eurasian-looking models and artists have dominated film casting and images in advertisements throughout Indonesia, as in many former colonies of Europe. Even as late as

2005 when one of the most respected Indonesian filmmakers Riri Riza made *Gie* (a film that idolized legendary political student activist of ethnic Chinese background Soe Hok Gie and widely regarded as Indonesia's boldest political biopic) he felt compelled to choose Eurasian-looking Nicholas Saputra to play the role of the hero. In the same period, there was an upsurge in demand for Chinese-looking artists and models, such that this trend became a topic for a special cover story in a tabloid (*Genie* 2005). Concurrently, *Meteor Garden* became a topic of household conversation. Substantive allusions to scenes from *Meteor Garden* can also be found in the popular Indonesian comedy film *30 Hari Mencari Cinta* (2003, Avianto), which is about a group of three young women who race to secure a steady romantic relationship within 30 days. In one scene, one of the protagonists sings a theme song from *Meteor Garden*.

Despite all the above, I hasten to add that racial prejudice or tension against the Chinese minority has not disappeared. One cannot generalize about the altered perception of this ethnic minority among women in the national population. In Surabaya, approximately an eight-hour drive from Yogyakarta where Pravitta conducted her research cited above, Ida met with cynical comments from a 29-year-old woman on this new fascination among younger women with the stars of *Meteor Garden*: "I wonder why many young girls like this boy [Dao Ming Tse] … It's funny. Girls like F4, but still they don't like Chinese [in Indonesia]! … They only like to see a Chinese man on TV" (Ida 2008: 106).

These new and massive public displays of attraction towards oriental-looking men are certainly remarkable; not least because it is happening in a society where anti-Chinese sentiment has run deep in the national psyche for more than a century, and it is barely half a decade since the country witnessed one of the most horrendous display of mass violence against this minority group (*see* Chapter 6). However, what is more stunning is how young female Muslims in their veils—at the height of Islamization—rushed to embrace the same non-Islamic new oriental-looking idols. Here we witness how the Indonesian politics of identity has reached a new level of hybridity. To illustrate this general phenomenon, let me quote here my fieldnotes dated 14 November 2010:

> Evi (one of my research assistants) and Fadli (her husband) picked me up from the hotel and we went to Malang Olympic Garden Shopping Mall to attend an event called Hallyu Explosion 2010. This was the second day of the two-day event. According to their publicity on Facebook, the day before they held a series of flash mob performances in several busiest public spots in the city, refashioning the

performances of top Korean boy bands, such as DBSK, Super Junior, and SHINee. On the second day, they prepared a very long list of programs, including a "K-pop Cover Dance parade" with 33 dancers and 29 cover dance groups; the official launching of a mixed and cross-gendered cover dance group; a series of cover dance competitions (solo, group, cross-gender, where boys played female artists and vice versa). While the show was running on stage at one end of the huge space of the new shopping mall, at different sections of the same air-conditioned auditorium-like space, there were different stands for a wide variety of exhibitions, demonstration, or activities that are listed in the program guide in English words: Korean Food Festival, Goodies Center, Korean Culture corner, Korean Traditional Fashion Corner, Korean Writing Tutorial, and Hanbok Studio. The whole event ran from mid-morning before we arrived, and continued until late afternoon, when I was very exhausted. In contrast to comparable events in Jakarta or Bandung with substantial sponsorship of the Korean embassy or Korean corporation, young fans in Malang were fully responsible for this gathering.

Malang Olympic Garden Shopping Mall was the newest shopping mall in this second largest city in East Java. Like Bandung in West Java, Malang is elevated several hundred meters higher than most towns and cities in this tropical archipelago, making itself an attractive place for many locals and foreigners alike for its cooler weather and scenic natural environments. The construction of Malang Olympic Garden Shopping Mall is a vulgar imposition on the immediate surroundings that used to be one of the city's best legacies of Dutch colonial urban planning. The site used to be a well-maintained and leafy residential area for the old rich of the city, with huge open space, rows of tennis courts, and a swimming pool. Locals told me the familiar stories in many former colonies about how state apparatuses had used coercive forces to silence those who were opposed to the eviction of the small traders, and to the construction of the mall.

When we arrived at the venue of the event, we saw streams of young women who also just arrived all going to the entrance door. The entrance fee was IDR 20,000 (USD 2.50); contestants had to pay five times higher to join the competition. More than once Evi told me emphatically, what she found most remarkable about these fans was the distance that separated them from access to any direct contacts from the artists they idolized. Evi contrasted them with their Jakarta-based counterparts who had seen, or at least had the hope of seeing the live performance of their idols, or participated in radio talks with selected Korean artists, their producers, or their managers. K-pop fans in this East Javanese city had to rely almost entirely on second or

third level mass mediated sources, and their own imagination about their idols. Yet, in such gatherings, they became so animated with such excitement as if the Korean artists were actually present!

Unlike Evi (a young female Muslim who veiled her head), what struck me (as an older non-Muslim male observer) was the large size of the crowd, the majority of whom were young female Muslims in veil who served as members of the organizing committee, as well as its guests. There were well over 1,000 people there, more than 90 per cent of them female in their late teens or early twenties. More than half donned the veil and wore Muslim dress. On stage, girls were dancing and singing vigorously to the music, blasting from super-high powered speakers. Some of these girls wore minimum clothes, others wore Muslim dress with their head veiled. Other visitors queued at the "Hanbok Studio" stand, each took turn to wear one of several Korean traditional dresses (*Hanbok*) available for rent from a portable wardrobe at the corner. Then each made a supposedly Korean pose or gesture, while her friend took several pictures from her mobile telephone. In the background was a huge backdrop, showing a real-size image of the facade of a Korean house. A non-Korean element glaringly present in the appearance of these young women was their own Islamic veil. The women simply slipped the Korean dress over the top of their own Muslim dress, and left the head cover intact.

At the other end of the space, I saw crowds of young female Muslims acting more passionately. Larger than life images of male K-pop stars were posted on large columns that supported the ceilings. Crowds of the visitors in veil and Muslim dresses, took turns to stand on a moveable chair near the column, so that they could be high enough to hug the image, pet or kiss the cheek of the man in the poster, while her friend—also in veil and Muslim dress—took a series of photographs from a mobile phone. Then they inspected the photos on the screen of the mobile phone, giggled, shared comments and repeated the session or moved on to have more photographs taken with other posters. Nowhere in Indonesian film or television can one find anything resembling the behavior of these young females in veil and Muslim dress. If it appeared in an Indonesian film, many would probably have found it unreal, while conservative groups would undoubtedly have reacted with outrage.

A number of previous case studies of Indonesia and elsewhere report that one of the common reasons for such a warm reception of television dramas from Korea and other Northeast Asia countries is the minimal sexual contact between the heterosexual protagonists in love. They barely kiss, let alone have premarital or extramarital sexual intercourse, even

when they spend a night together in bed. The series *Meteor Garden* is a case in point. Indonesian female viewers repeatedly emphasize this as a factor that drew their respect and commendation (*see* Merdikaningtyas 2006; Pravitta 2004). It is conceivable that they can tolerate American television or films that include either scenes of erotic engagements, or mildly suggest such intimacy between the protagonists. Such depictions would only reaffirm the general perception of the 'East versus West' divide. Such tolerance does not imply that the young middle-class viewers in Indonesia would readily identify with these liberal minded characters as they would with the sexually restrained protagonists of *Meteor Garden*. If such a presupposition has validity, the 'cultural proximity' thesis returns to haunt again.

Against such a view, I must bring forward three counterarguments. First, Indonesia is rich with commercial films and television dramas focused around adultery. However, in contrast to the American fiction, most of these show a female villain rather than the heroine being a party to the sexual activity in the story. Second, nudity and eroticism in stage and screen culture within Indonesian society is received differently along ethnic, religious and class lines. Like elsewhere, some of the most conservative (morally and ideologically) people in Indonesia can be found among the middle classes.[8] As mentioned earlier, the case of *dangdut* performer Inul Daratista and her lower-class fans belies and often threatens what is socially acceptable, as defined by the conservative groups in the country. Third, it is wise not to assume that all Indonesian female fans of contemporary popular culture from Northeast Asia are more sexually repressed than the audience for Hollywood-styled fiction. More than once the Indonesian public has been stirred by survey results demonstrating a high rate of premarital sexual activity among young people (*see* Heffner-Smith 2009), including in Yogyakarta where Merdikaningtyas (2006) and Pravitta (2004) conducted their separate studies. In her own study, Pravitta includes a section (2004: 13–9) discussing the many testimonies of sexual fantasies that these female viewers had after watching *Meteor Garden*, ranging from imagined petting to having sexual intercourse with the fictional character Dao Ming Tse (2004: 16–7).

[8] I have discussed this elsewhere (Heryanto 2003); *see also* Heryanto (1996, 1999b), Kahn (1996a, b), Lev (1990), Robison (1990), Tanter and Young (1990), and Wright (1987, 1989).

In a study about young Javanese well-educated female Muslims in the decade, Nancy Smith-Hefner obtained admission from many of those youths that they had

> been confused and insecure when they first came to the university and experienced its overwhelming freedom and diversity .... For many young women, college is the first sustained period away from home. Most women who live away from home take up residence in rental rooms or boarding houses (*kost*) with other women students.
>
> (2007: 401)

In a separate examination of the same social group, Smith-Hefner discovered "that the overwhelming majority receive little if any concrete guidance in school or from their parents as to how to handle their interactions with members of the opposite sex" (2009: 227). Understandably, under such disorienting circumstances, these young women took a wide range of paths. Some found comfort and pleasure in the sexually and politically conservative films and television dramas from the newly emerging post-Islamists (*see* Chapter 3), or in K-pop, without compromising their Islamic identity. Others found new liberty and pleasure in the expanding network among fans groups and dance cover activities. The more inquisitive or adventurous souls explored further afield and tested the boundaries of new morally acceptable norms. Yet still others concentrated on deepening their spiritual commitment to religious piety (Rinaldo 2008).

Of those diverse trends, the most visually intriguing image that I met with during my fieldwork is of the young women in veil and Muslim dress performing their Korean singing and dancing skills in public. When we asked some of them whether they saw any dissonance or conflict between being a good Muslim and an active member of their fan group, their answer was consistently "no". Some of them admitted, though, that their activities had raised eyebrows among those around them, and attracted non-complimentary comments. In the mid-1980s, when female student activists donned veils as a sign of political dissent, they received condescending remarks from members of their own family and close friends (Brenner 1996: 674–5). Three decades later, when veiling became the norm among Muslim women, some of these young female Muslims took the public by surprise again by adding a new layer of identity and clothing with their Islamic dresses. Again, they received unwelcome remarks.

This chapter has shown the active agency of young female middle-class Indonesians in incorporating popular cultures from South Korea and a few other neighboring countries in Northeast Asia, in an attempt to explore and build a renewed identity as modern and cosmopolitan oriented persons. They did so at a specific historical juncture, which distinguishes their experience from their counterparts in most other parts of Asia or beyond where K-pop is also warmly received. The Indonesian case is characterized by the convergence of a set of factors: the decline of a strongly masculinist culture following the fall of the militarist rule of the New Order and the subsequent huge ideological and cultural vacuum; a nationwide desire to seek an alternative model for being a modern Indonesian coinciding with a dramatic expansion of new media and social networks that has empowered young women to both consume and produce textual, audio and visual materials with ease across the globe; and finally, an emboldened sense of liberty among segments of the new middle-class for pursuing global trends in consumer culture. This chapter takes special interest in how Indonesia's K-pop fever and Asianization of Asia intersects with the legacy of racial tension against the ethnic Chinese minority (Chapter 6), and the rise of Islamization (Chapters 2 and 3).

The overall picture we get from the foregoing discussion is a degree of empowerment for young female fans of popular culture from Northeast Asia, further mitigation of racial prejudices and tensions that have long plagued public life in Indonesia, and a new form of hybridity among post-Islamists. The politics of identity and pleasure described in the foregoing may irritate the largely conservative groups that dominate contemporary Indonesia. This may or may not develop further into something larger with the potential to challenge the status quo. However, the new energy among K-pop fans cannot be taken unambiguously as a sign of a politically progressive trend or movement. As suggested earlier, the great controversy over Inul Daratista (*see also* Heryanto 2008b) underscores how the K-pop fever is characteristically a trend within the urban middle classes. While the more politically conscious members of the middle classes have criticized the K-pop mania, as illustrated during the visit of F4 in 2003, the politics of these self-proclaimed progressives also deserve closer examination. The next chapter, focusing on the street politics of the underprivileged, will attempt to do just that.

CHAPTER 8

From Screen to Street Politics

The previous chapter discusses how the new wave of popular culture from Northeast Asia has mesmerized urban-centric middle-classed youthful engagements mainly through television shows, DVDs and other mobile gadgets. This final chapter looks at how the pervasive screen culture affects and is manipulated by non-elite groups, often conveniently referred to as "the masses" in street politics. This phenomenon is best illustrated by Indonesia's 2009 general elections, one of the largest in Asia. To complement and counter-balance the general hype about the liberating power of social media in societies undergoing a process of democratization, this chapter will show the darker side of the Janus-faced effects of media technology. On the one hand, the new media technology was empowering to selected segments of social life, leading many to the illusion that all citizens are equal before the law. On the other, the same technology in specific social settings can lead to political disempowerment, splintering local communities in unexpected ways. As more and more people have easier, quicker and more affordable access to intimate communication to others half a globe away on a 24/7 basis, they often remain distant strangers to their next-door neighbors.

Earlier, near the end of Chapter 5, I mentioned an irony: the intense repression and propaganda of the New Order had been responsible for keeping alive its own opposition, counter-propaganda, and resistance. A more gentle approach to the same domination in a different disguise proved to be more effective in exasperating and incapacitating progressive political movements. Likewise, in the case below, partly due to old and new media for screen cultures being widely accessible, contemporary masses in Indonesia appeared to have been dispersed and domesticated in a more voluntarily fashion. This is a situation that the New Order

government strongly desired but could not achieve. Greater political liberalization in a society does not automatically increase the empowerment of the masses.

For comparison purposes, this chapter will describe and highlight in one section, the few outstanding features of the behavior of the masses in street politics during the New Order when screen culture was tightly controlled and the internet was new. In another section, I will highlight their behavior one decade after the regime collapsed. The chapter will conclude with another section that examines the heavy influence of entertainment industry upon the 2009 elections, with campaigns copying the formats of television shows and the masses exchanging political participation for the ultimate domestication of politics by entertainment. However, let me first discuss in the next section, the concept of Indonesia as an orality-oriented society, which I adopt in order to then make sense of the social changes analyzed in the subsequent sections.[1]

Orality-Oriented Mode of Living

In the middle of Chapter 4, in discussing the popularity of independent filmmaking, I refer to Indonesia as a strongly orality-oriented social environment, which explains why Indonesians are more susceptible to the charms of the moving image, and are creatively more responsive to what the video camera offers than to a computerized word processor. I wish to elaborate on this notion a little further, as it is very useful to understanding what appears to be an obsessive enchantment with contemporary screen culture. Indonesia has a high official literacy rate (over 90 per cent). Statistics aside, however, this official literacy rate refers primarily to the ability to recognize—rather than a preference on the part of the majority of population for maximum use of—the alphabet and mathematical figures. In this chapter, the reference to Indonesia as a primarily orality-oriented society implies a fairly low rate of *functional* literacy, as opposed to the *nominal* literacy indicated by the statistics; a high priority to fluid, instantaneous and highly collective participatory mode of communication (features that characterize oral communication), instead of

[1] An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "Entertainment, Domestication, and Dispersal: Street Politics as Popular Culture" in *Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions and Society*, ed. Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner (2010), 181–98. It has been reproduced and significantly revised and updated here with the kind permission of the publisher, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg.

the individual act of silent writing and reading a fixed, uniform string of texts. The notion of Indonesia as an orality-oriented society is derived from a complex set of ideas originally attributed to the work of Marshall McLuhan (1964). It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss this body of literature in detail,[2] but a few of its core features need to be highlighted.

Compared to their counterparts in more literacy-dependent societies, many people in Indonesia, including the literati and graduates of higher education, share important information and messages through face-to-face communication. This necessarily involves the physical presence of the interlocutors, expressing themselves through both spoken words, and more importantly the unsaid, and body language, in specific spatial and temporal ambience of 'real-time' interactions. Outsiders whose native language relies heavily on verbalized communication often fail to comprehend this communication style. In such a society, everyday life tends to be communally oriented, with little or no space for privacy.[3] All these features can be contrasted with those of more literacy-dependent societies, where the seminal separation between author, text, and audience as autonomous beings is widely celebrated, and accuracy along with a great reliance on objectified text is highly valued. A sacred oath is commonly used to formalize an agreement in an orality-oriented society, whereas a written contract is used in literacy-dependent nations. Silent reading in a busy public space is normal in the former, while it would be taken as strange or anti-social in the latter, where conversations with complete strangers in public spaces (such as people sitting next to each other in a public transport or waiting room) about family matters are the standard practice.

Obviously, no modern society today is in reality either purely orality-oriented or literacy-dependent. In any given society, the different modes of communication are in competition with each other, with certain historical periods more marked by one than the other. Since the second half of the previous century, the tension between the orality versus literacy modes of being and communication has been complicated by the rapid development and dissemination of digital media technology.

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[2] *See also* Carey (1998), Comor (2013), Genosko (1999), McLuhan and Zingrone (1995), and Tremblay (2012).

[3] Strictly speaking, there is as yet no translation for the word 'privacy' in Indonesian. With the relentless march of capitalism in Indonesia from the 1980s, there has been a serious struggle to introduce and legitimise the notion of 'private property', with limited and slow success.

Contrary to the expectations of many children of the twentieth and twenty-first century Enlightenment, the revolutionary power of the new technology has been more challenging to the people (especially the older generation) in the highly literate societies (Fernback 2003) than those in the more orality-oriented. The same technology easily finds a warm reception in orality-oriented societies like Indonesia, as it fits well with existing norms and social practices, characterized by fluid, instantaneous and highly collective participatory mode of communication (Heryanto 2007).

Like the modern nation-state itself, elections as we know them today are the product of a highly literate social order. This does not mean, however, that elections or democracy are essentially incompatible with non-Western societies. Among the orality-oriented and formerly colonized peoples in Asia and Africa, elections have been held with varying degrees of success. Regardless of whether or not coercion was involved in their introduction to these orality-oriented societies, elections have often encountered difficulties beyond technical or logistical issues. To date, the standard administration of elections involves legislation written in the highly analytical language of the literati, and a procession where voters go to the voting booth as individuals; they read and leave a mark on the voting paper in 'private' solitude, and this is followed by bureaucratically organized vote counting. Elections may, of course, take on a very different shape and process in the future with the expansion of digital technology, in ways already anticipated, for instance, by the voting procedures used in reality television shows (*see* below). Against this background, the following sections will discuss the specific features of the 2009 elections in Indonesia and point to their historical differences to their predecessors.

2009 Election Campaign[4]

As with most previous Indonesian elections, the outcome of the 2009 national parliamentary ballot was highly predictable, although the precise degree of the winning party's triumph was a subject of speculation prior to voting day.[5] The victory of the Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat, or PD)—and the subsequent re-election of incumbent president Susilo

[4] I gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance of Ahmad Faisol and his team from ISAI (Jakarta) in collecting a large amount of empirical material from the 2009 elections on my behalf, which I use in this section.

[5] The 1955 and 1999 elections, both of which took place at moments of crisis, were less predictable.

Bambang Yudhoyono—also meant a continuation and indeed a strengthening of the political status quo.[6] One important innovation that distinguished the 2009 elections from their predecessors, however, was a new regulation that allocated seats won by parties to the nominees with the highest number of votes, not those ranked highest on the party list. This open party list system was the result of a decision by the Constitutional Court in December 2008 to declare party list rankings unconstitutional. The new rules had two contradictory effects on the general population: in a very complex way, they were both empowering and disempowering at the same time.

Despite a host of logistical problems, the 2009 elections had an empowering effect in that they extended or reinforced the political education of all citizens. Through a wide range of means, Indonesians—especially the socially disadvantaged—were informed about the basic principles and values of elections as an essential component of a democracy. This was not a particularly new experience, however. Even at the height of the New Order's politics of depoliticization, some information on the practical skills and knowledge required to participate in elections had been made available. From 1999, in the absence of state authoritarianism and of the former top-down style of propaganda and indoctrination, political education—particularly regarding elections—took on a more democratically conscious character. Most importantly, this change was accompanied by a high degree of voluntarism and bottom-up participation.

Before the 2009 elections, officials from the General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, or KPU) and the political parties travelled to remote areas to introduce the new rules and procedures. Many of these activities were designed specifically for targeted audiences from a wide variety of geographical, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and most were highly orality-oriented. Consequently, the information sessions relied heavily on face-to-face interactions, including the use of traditional performing arts (with human actors or other visual aids), modern music concerts and ceremonies in the vernacular language, mostly within the framework of casual gatherings. Some KPU and party instructors travelled on foot to traditional markets so that they could communicate with locals face-to-face.

[6] Taylor (1996a: 4) observes that this is the general outcome of elections in Southeast Asia. It should probably be added that the same is true of many other countries outside the region.

In several places, vans fitted with loudspeakers traveled slowly through the villages, broadcasting important information live over their speakers. The attempts to educate the masses even extended to those who were too young to vote. In Central Jakarta, for example, teachers from six elementary schools spent many hours training hundreds of pupils in the basic ideas of political elections. The training involved not just lectures and discussions, but also simulation activities in which pupils in grades 5 and 6 experimented with mock elections. These young students delivered campaign speeches from lecterns in the schoolyard, designed posters, engaged in open debates about policy, cast votes by secret ballot and assessed the validity of ballot papers. Activities such as these could be found across the archipelago, making the 2009 elections a remarkably educative and inclusive experience for many.

While the elections had energizing and empowering effects on common Indonesians, these were counterbalanced by the centrifugal tendencies triggered by the new electoral laws. Most importantly, the new regulations pitted candidates from the same party against each other. One of the most obvious impacts of the new laws was to eliminate the longstanding convention of party leaders putting themselves at the top of the party rankings and thus securing their (re-)election. Under the new rules, these politicians had no choice but to invest in new and extensive campaign efforts in order to maintain their positions. As a side effect of this more competitive electoral system, a new type of candidate emerged to challenge the dominance of old party functionaries: 'celebrities', more specifically television and film actors, musicians and comedians.

Although in absolute numbers the 61 celebrities were a tiny fraction of the more than 11,000 candidates across the country who ran for parliamentary seats (Messakh 2009), they drew an impressive amount of public attention. The number of celebrities who made it into parliament was higher than initially expected.[7] In some cases, they did much better

[7] According to one unofficial source (KDPI 2009), as many as 18 such artists had a good chance of taking a parliamentary seat. They included: Okky Asokawati (PPP), Rachel Mariam Sayidina (Gerindra), Rieke Diah Pitaloka (PDIP), Theresia EE Pardede (Demokrat), Ingrid Maria Palupi Kansil (Demokrat), Nurul Arifin (Golkar), Tetty Kadi Bawono (Golkar), Nurul Qomar (Demokrat), Primus Yustisio (PAN), TB. Dedi S. Gumelar (PDIP), Jamal Mirdad (Gerindra), Angelina Sondakh (Demokrat), M. Guruh Irianto Soekarnoputra (PDIP), CP. Samiadji Massaid (Demokrat), Venna Melinda (Demokrat), Eko Hendro Purnomo (PAN), Ruhut Poltak Sitompul (Demokrat), and Tantowi Yahya (Golkar).

in the elections than their own senior politicians. For instance, television drama actor Rieke Dyah Pitaloka obtained the single largest number of votes for PDIP in the West Java II electoral district, leaving party leader Taufiq Kiemas behind. Similarly, former film star Nurul Arifin ranked first in West Java VII district, defeating senior politician Ade Komarudin from the same party, Golkar (Dariyanto 2009). Not to be outdone, comedian Mandra came in ahead of the incumbent House Speaker Agung Laksono (Bayuni 2009). In 2008, actors Rano Karno and Dede Yusuf had respectively been elected deputy district head of Tanggerang and vice-governor of the province of West Java (Khoiri and Ivvaty 2009). However, the considerable success of celebrities was only partly related to the new electoral laws and regulations. Other factors were at play as well, as will be discussed in a later section.

An equally significant effect of the amended electoral law was to encourage an upsurge in the desire among ordinary citizens to run in the regional elections. These people are the focus of this chapter. One observer has described Indonesia's 2009 parliamentary elections, which were held from the central down to the provincial, district and municipal levels, as "the world's largest single-day election" (McDowell 2009): 11,219 candidates competed for the 560 seats in the national parliament; 32,263 nominees tried to obtain one of the 1,998 parliamentary seats at the provincial level; and 246,588 candidates contested 16,270 seats at the district/municipality level. On the one hand, these figures seemed to contradict widespread reports about the prevailing apathy among the general population. On the other hand, the same figures confirmed people's cynical suspicion that something other than genuine interest in a political or moral cause must be driving so many people to compete.

Entry to electoral politics by citizens with little or no political experience in formal state administration is not new in Indonesia. Especially after the fall of the New Order in 1998, party officials recruited thugs and other underworld figures to act as political fixers or to mobilize voters (*see* last section of Chapter 5). In contrast, the 2009 elections saw a significant number of ordinary citizens—including some fragile-looking elderly—who decided to run in the local elections. Many of these people did not have meaningful economic power, political experience or institutional support. Examples abounded across the archipelago: they included *becak* (tricycle) drivers Abdul Wahid (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Tegal) and Karseno (Partai Matahari Bangsa, Banyumas); *ojek* (motorised two-wheeler taxi) driver Soleeman Mooi (unidentified party, Kupang);

street vendors Lasiman (Partai Demokrasi Pembaruan, Solo) and Erni Wahyuni (Partai Bintang Reformasi, Samarinda); vehicle hand-wash worker Joko Prihatin (Partai Amanat Nasional, Kudus); Public Parking Assistant Sukardji (Partai Demokrasi Pembaruan, Ponorogo); and *angkota* (local van) driver Benedictus Adu (independent candidate, Serikat Masyarakat Miskin Indonesia, Jakarta). On the face of it, this is an index of the success of mass political education.

One of the most astonishing new phenomena in the 2009 elections was the emergence of lone campaigners. Apparently, many segments of the Indonesian population were led to believe that anyone could run in the elections, regardless of their financial and political resources. They also believed, it seems, that campaigning could be done effectively on an individual basis. This did not mean that their election-related gatherings featured an individual star performer as the focus of the event. Rather, it meant the candidate put on a one-person show in public, sometimes without the presence of organized supporters. For instance Enteng Sanjaya, dubbed "Manusia Contreng" (Man with a Voting Tick), had his whole body painted in yellow and white, to illustrate the ballot paper. He danced alone in the middle of the main street in Pasuruan (East Java) and pushed his bike around the town to "socialize" (meaning to inform the masses of the polling procedure). A Sragen-born and Jakarta-based *ojek* driver, Agus Suwarno, toured the nation on his bicycle to demonstrate his support, and garner the support of others, for the Partai Gerindra. In Banten, Hudi Yusuf was a lone campaigner for his candidacy, wearing a superhero costume. Another candidate from Partai Matahari Bangsa, Tony Wangsit, visited villagers around Tulungagung door to door, singing and "socializing" his campaign message. In combination, these individualized activities signified an important shift away from previous campaign practices, which had drawn their strength from an impressive display of mass power.

Ideally, one would not make hasty judgments and dismiss the above behavior outright as quixotic delusion. However, given the broader political playing field, it is hard not to see it as hopelessly pathetic. It is not within the scope of this chapter to explore the psychological dynamics of these candidates. My interest is in the external aspects of the phenomenon and its relationship to the broader contexts of Indonesian politics and the expansion of the new media and entertainment industry. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned a strong inclination towards communalism than individualism prevails in Indonesia; I also argued that this inclination has something to do with Indonesians' orientation to

orality-oriented communication. Such inclinations find expression in major street politics. This was clearly the case during election campaign weeks while the New Order was in power. From this historical perspective, one can argue that the 2009 election campaigns (and to a lesser extent the 2004 elections) marked a departure from the norm of the past two decades. They embodied what the New Order government had strongly desired but was incapable of achieving, namely the domestication of the general masses by dispersal.

The New Order Masses: The Politics of Appearance

During much of the New Order, elections were held regularly. However, there was barely anything that resembled a contest of political parties. The outcomes of six successive elections during the New Order were the same and always highly predictable. Nonetheless, the government took the trouble of engineering some rhetorical appearance of popular participation and political contest. It mobilized the masses and attempted to make them appear to be supporters of rival political parties, which were already tightly controlled. In reality, however, it transpired that the masses behaved in ways that were very different to what the government wanted—and indeed different to what many urban intellectuals and distant observers have generally understood.

In contrast to the situation since 1999, when scores of contesting parties have fragmented the loyalties of the politically active masses, the masses in post-1971 New Order elections were mobilized behind no more than three officially sanctioned electoral machines. The large concentrations of rival crowds made it possible for members of each group to *imagine* and *act as if* they were part of an overwhelmingly powerful force, even if some crowds were larger than others. This was particularly remarkable since, outside the election period, the regime offered no public space for independent political forces. In an ironic inverse of the post-New Order situation, the masses barely had any power *between* the five-yearly elections, but in the brief moments of the elections they transformed themselves into a gigantic public force. From the perspective of the regime, the elections were intended to be no more than a make-believe spectacle. But in reality, the presence and actions of the masses were real and forceful.

These masses manifested their power not only through their sheer presence in immense numbers in the streets, stadiums and town squares, but more importantly through loud noise and strong colors. This power

was not consciously political, ideologically driven or organized along any identifiable structure. It had neither the capacity nor the desire to challenge, let alone replace, the incumbent government. There is no basis for romanticizing it. Nonetheless, the effects of this display of power were threatening to the political elite and the politics of appearance of 'stability and order' that the government subscribed to. The unruly behavior of the masses took different forms but the most salient was convoys of motorcycles with no mufflers. Macho male motorcyclists in elaborate costumes and accessories roamed the streets and flaunted their multiple violations of traffic rules and conventions. More than the allowed maximum of two persons would ride on a single motorcycle, none of them wearing helmets, some even standing on the motorcycle seat. They ignored all rules pertaining to traffic direction and lane division in a street. With mufflers removed, they made a show of the sound of their motorcycles, speeding far over the limit and performing all kinds of risky stunts that created a spectacle and occasional accidents. Others rode on overpopulated trucks, usually equipped with a loudspeaker that played loud music. As one would predict, these activities caused traffic jams, accidents, and brawls with non-participants or with supporters of other political parties.

It was the down-to-earth, highly masculine festivity and the flaunted illegality of the event that appeared to matter most to the participating masses. It was a mega-performance of the politics of non-identity and pleasure. The process and results of the election that provided a space for their activities in the first place were irrelevant. In contrast to the urban intelligentsia and political activists who took the elections seriously and denounced the elections for illegality or lack of credibility, the masses seemed not to care in the least about the manipulated elections or state pretense.

> When given 'false promises' they devoured them, as they were, without being mystified; and they responded in like manner. When presented with hypocrisy, contradictions, and fiction, they responded with the same—but on a greater scale or with greater intensity. When the state acted 'irrationally', or violently, or insincerely, the masses responded like mirrors—but with amplification. Once every five years these politically alienated and economically exploited masses became the supreme anonymous subjects that dominated the public space for several nights and days. They celebrated this triumph with the same discursive repertoire they had learned from the state machinery, such as very elaborate colors, loud sounds, mass rallies, displays of

> masculine strength, and aggressive violence that on most other occasions were the monopoly of the state.
>
> (Heryanto 2006a: 151)

To understand these masses we need to go beyond the McLuhanist conceptual framework of orality-oriented societies. On the face of it, the masses behaved in ways that resonate with Bakthin's theory of topsy-turvy politics in the traditional carnivals in Europe. But as I have argued elsewhere (Heryanto 2006a: 149–53), Jean Baudrillard's conception of the masses is more apt. Instead of reading their activities as a form of political resistance, perhaps we should take them as an unintended subversion on the part of the 'apolitical' masses. Baudrillard explained the difference:

> traditional resistance consists of reinterpreting messages according to the group's own code and for its own ends. The masses, on the contrary, accept everything and redirect everything *en bloc* into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without requiring any meaning, ultimately without resistance.
>
> (1983, 43)

Cultural politics has been sorely under-studied or misunderstood in Indonesian studies. Unsurprisingly, this unintended subversion by a kind of hyper-obedience on the part of the masses has largely gone unnoticed or has been seriously underestimated by Indonesian intelligentsia and their distant observers.[8] In contrast, the New Order's state officers were more cognizant of their potential force. It must be recalled that the New Order state came to power in 1966 thanks to the successful instigation of a mass hysteria against and massacres of the Left (Chapter 4). With

[8] Interestingly, in an "Afterword" to R.H. Taylor's *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (1996b), the late political scientist Daniel Lev expressed a sigh of relief at discovering that "culture" and "cultural approach" had been entirely ignored in the collection of essays. As he explained, Lev's (like his contemporaries') misgivings about the cultural aspects of studying elections in particular and politics in general stemmed from an outdated conception of 'culture' as something unique or essential to a particular society and static. It is sad that even in 2009 I still encountered more than a few scholars who denounced 'cultural studies' based on similar presumptions and misguided perceptions of what cultural studies does and an unfamiliarity with how 'culture' has been critically and profoundly problematized by those who feel comfortable engaging with 'cultural studies'.

sustained and generous support from the world's advocates of liberal democracy, this regime maintained its power for the next three decades with a significant measure of thuggery (Chapter 5).

Baudrillard's conception of the masses is derived from his discussion of the effects of media technology, largely in contemporary liberal societies. His insight resonates very well with Achille Mbembe's discussion of postcolonial subjects in African power relations. Mbembe's discussion strikes a chord with my own understanding of Indonesia under the New Order:

> In order to make itself intelligible to the greatest number of people, it [the postcolonial state] must publicize itself. It must colonize languages and sounds. It must inscribe itself in the movements of bodies .... In order to flaunt itself and to show itself off .... In order to be seen and heard by all, it does not hesitate to take on great dimensions, to resort to large quantities, to sometimes spill over in details, to swell up, to repeat itself ...
>
> (Mbembe 1992: 130)

In typically hyper-obedient style, the New Order's masses responded to the sham elections by displaying equally exuberant and richly stylized signs of compliance and loyalty—not necessarily in order to conceal their resentments or to deceive the ruling elite, at least not until the right moment for revenge came. To cite Mbembe once again:

> dictators can go to sleep at night lulled by roars of adulation and support ... only to wake up the next morning to find their golden calves smashed and their tablets of law overturned. The applauding crowds of yesterday have become today a cursing, abusive mob.
>
> (1992: 14–5)

New Order officials would presumably have no difficulty agreeing with Mbembe. In a move that may seem self-contradicting, from the 1992 elections onward the New Order government made successive attempts to cancel what it had initially sponsored, namely the mobilization of the urban mass to enliven and animate the otherwise dull series of sham elections. In its place, the government proposed that future election campaigns should be conducted within the confines of a demarcated space (a well-guarded hall or stadium), and preferably through the mass media (particularly television), which the government held under tight control. By keeping the masses at a distance from the campaign venues

or rendering them passive spectators of the mass media, the government was hoping to be able to regain 'order and stability'.[9]

As with many other state policies, the proposed restriction on convoys of motorcycles was never fully enforced across the nation. What took place were gradual restrictions on an ad hoc basis, which led to uneven results. For instance in Yogyakarta in 1992 the local government made sporadic and inconsistent attempts to restrict the motorcycle convoys. In hyper-obedience, the masses from all ostensibly competing parties responded in unison. Not only did they refrain from running the convoy and confronting the security forces, they went further by removing all signs and appurtenances of the election campaign, thus threatening to destroy the state-sponsored political spectacle called the 'festival of democracy'.

Until the New Order was formally ousted in 1998, the convoy of motorcycles was never totally absent from street politics. Indeed, the first post-New Order elections in 1999 saw the urban masses unleash their long-repressed desire for one of the greatest convoys of motorcycles. Ironically, it was not until 2009 when the elections became more liberalized that the massive crowds dispersed voluntarily, the convoys thinned and became few and far between, and the underclasses were atomized. More than ten years since Indonesians had begun the attempt to reform the nation, the fear of the threat of the masses lives on.[10] But by now the masses had been seriously fragmented into scores of political parties, and—worse still—many members of the underclass were engaged in running in the election as lone candidates.

Thus, successive post-New Order governments' efforts to ban motorcycle convoys were redundant. Few in the population seemed interested either in the restriction or in revitalizing the convoys. Despite the renewed legal restrictions, convoys of motorcycles as part of street politics continued to be seen well into the 2009 elections, but they occurred significantly less frequently, with much smaller numbers of participants, with none of the past exuberance of style. In the meantime the use of

[9] There is another layer of irony in the earlier elections. The same government attempted to prohibit the media to publish any reports of election campaign activities in 1977 (van Dijk 1977: 12–3).

[10] To "secure" the inauguration of the new members of the parliament on 1 Oct. 2009, the police deployed no less than 10,000 officers (*Jakarta Post* 2009b).

a glossy overlay of multimedia in election campaigns has surged remarkably and has come to dominate the scene in national and local elections. Campaigns in the mass media became the most elaborated elements in the 2009 electoral laws and were strongly encouraged. Inadvertently, this new trend precisely fits in with the New Order's proposal of 1992 to curtail the kind of mass participation that it had been unable to control.

Election Campaigns as Popular Culture

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the trends in the 2009 elections cannot be attributed solely to the competition-inducing nature of the new electoral laws. There is no direct causal relationship between the new laws and the galvanization of enthusiasm among the underclass to run for election. The expansion of the new media and entertainment industry must have played a significant role as well. This section will elaborate this point.

Scholars of media studies have long been aware of the Janus-faced effects of media technology. The new media technology is both socializing and alienating, empowering in some areas and disempowering in others. The 2009 electoral laws made democratic procedures more equal, leading many to the illusion that all citizens are politically equal in elections, regardless of their socioeconomic strength and connections. In 2009, many individual villagers ran in the parliamentary elections, splintering their local communities and foreclosing the possibility of meaningful mass support for any one candidate. In a separate but intersecting course of development, new media technology has transformed the brave new industrial world of the mid-twentieth century into what McLuhan called the 'global village'. What McLuhan did not foresee, however, was the inherent counter-effect that comes with the dispersal of digital media gadgets. As more and more people separated by large distances have easier, quicker and more affordable access to intimate communication around the clock, they often remain distant strangers to their next door neighbors.

Recent studies on elections and popular culture in Indonesia have highlighted the role of celebrities in party politics and the growing interest of professional politicians in singing or dancing in public. Newspapers and magazines as well as scholarly works have documented, for example, the incumbent president's success in attracting potential voters with songs he had written. Most writing on the connections between politics/politicians and popular culture/artists focuses on the use one

makes of the other, or the involvement of one group of professionals in the domain of the other (*see* Kartomi 2005; Lindsay 2007, 2009; McGraw 2009). Often these studies focus on prominent artists and politicians, and how they 'manipulate' the masses. However, I wish to consider two distinct yet closely related processes. I have discussed in Chapter 1 the overwhelming growth of the media and the entertainment industry. Now, I wish to consider the appeal of the 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) spirit to the general population, a recent trend accelerated by new media developments, including the recent wave of independent filmmaking (*see* Chapter 4). Both discussions draw less immediate and less personalized connections between politics and popular culture than have generally been emphasized in the existing literature. The connections between the two processes are more fundamental and have more far-reaching implications than most studies have indicated thus far, because they represent a new modality of perspective and outlook. Both focus on disadvantaged groups of people.

From 1998, Indonesia experienced a decade of media expansion that was phenomenal in both its scope and its intensity. On top of the vast liberalization regarding what can be discussed in public, the period saw a quantum leap in many directions. These developments were matched by an equally phenomenal growth in the entertainment industry. For the first time in history, a new generation of Indonesian musicians saw their albums sell well over a million copies each. New Indonesian film titles broke new records well beyond the popularity of any other films from any country, including top Hollywood blockbusters (Grayling 2002; Heryanto 2008b: 6; van Heeren 2002). On television, melodramatic *sinetron* (drama series) and reality shows were two of the most popular kinds of programs and continue to dominate the total broadcasting hours. Of the various sub-categories of reality shows, singing talent search competitions such as 'Indonesian Idol' (RCTI) and 'Akademi Fantasi Indosiar' (Indosiar) stand out (for details, *see* Coutas 2008). Indeed it is fair to say that one of the most dynamic areas of public life in Indonesia today is the media and entertainment industry (Sen and Hill 2000).

As the power of the media and entertainment industry has come to hold sway in the nation's economy and politics, one notices the marked progress of the feminization of public life, which goes beyond the appearance of women in election campaigns and the women representatives in parliament. For too long the entire corpus of the modern nation has been focused primarily on the masculine-biased history of nation-state building and modernization or the impediments to this (militarism,

human rights abuse, rampant corruption, violent ethno-religious conflicts, and latterly Islamist militants) (Heryanto 2008b: 7). Pop culture, especially in the form of televised entertainment, has been relegated to the secondary 'private' or 'domestic' sphere, primarily for the second-class gender. From this follows a familiar, if deeply problematic, sense of division between the masculine world of news, scholarship and conferences versus feminine soap operas, gossips magazines and family matters.[11] In 2009, as the macho convoy of motorcycles faded away, a new set of election festivities was evident in its formative stages.

It is important not to romantize either the macho convoys of the street politics during the New Order rule or the new feminized and mass-mediated entertainment-focused politics. Both have had serious consequences for Indonesian society. Those convoys often prompted serious violent confrontations among the rank and file, some with fatal consequences. Understandably, there was a general sense of relief, not least from the police and the privileged members of the urban middle class, when the government, all contesting parties, as well as the general population shared a commitment to running *Kampanye Damai* (Peaceful Campaign) activities in 2009.[12] Several female candidates explicitly made separate statements to the effect that they preferred more orderly types of campaign activities. These new forms of campaign activities that they opted for were reminiscent of the old community celebrations of the Independence Day: sport competitions, karaoke singing contests, fashion shows, cooking demonstrations, or fishing contests. However, the new twist of the election campaign tradition came with new problems, particularly among women, as will be discussed in a moment.

The impact of the new and engulfing wave of televised entertainment upon Indonesians, especially youths and women, remains underexplored despite the growing interest it has attracted among students of

[11] According to the 2007 *Kompas* survey, almost half of all the respondents indicated that the remote control of the family television was in the hands of the children, and more than 20 per cent said it was in the hands of the mother, well above those saying the father had the control (Satrio 2007).

[12] In West Java the government extended the restrictions. Apart from convoys, "any activities that would attract the masses" such as music concerts and soccer matches during the election campaign period were declared illegal (Fikri 2009). In September 2009 in the wake of the Idul Fitri celebration when people had barely discussed the recent elections, Jakarta Governor Fauzi Bowo strongly discouraged residents to run the tradition of an Idul Fitri eve procession (*takbiran*) on the streets (Zuharon and Sjafari 2009).

media and cultural studies. With special reference to the elections, the attention of many observers has usually been directed to the gamut of the economy, aesthetics or politics of image-building in public and particularly in the mass media and advertisements, with the increased roles of the professional consultation agencies (*see* Hill 2009; for Indonesia, *see* Setiyono 2008; for cases in the neighboring countries, *see* Chua 2007). My interest is much broader, and with a focus on the non-elite. Among the proliferating local television networks across the country, rural folk including peasants, truck drivers, retired school teachers and elementary school pupils acquired new skills and enjoyment pertaining to their appearance on television (Pradityo 2008). Among urban youths one can easily find something more serious than an addiction to televised entertainment. In the past few years, I noticed a tendency to adopt the common parameters of a television show around which Indonesians would organize their daily activities and their casual and formal conversations or would plan future projects, all off-air. What I have noticed is a reality show in reverse: instead of having a television program projecting a moving image of unscripted events involving non-professional performers as if everything is a mirror of real life in real time, offscreen people are mirroring the television programs to act, speak or sing as if they are on a television show. One common example is the way meetings and social gatherings, including formal ceremonies, are hosted. Two young people, one of each gender and equally smart-looking, emulate the behavior of television show hosts: they speak in turn, complement each other's speeches, make light jokes and comment on the event, all in the attempt to be as entertaining as possible in ways typical of a television host. Often without the slightest intention of being funny or ironic, they use the formulaic expressions from television programs between items at the meeting: "Don't go anywhere. Stay with us after these messages".

Against this background, it is not at all surprising that the 2009 election campaign was subject to the same pressure to be designed and presented with the strongest possible characteristics as entertainment rather than political education and propaganda. Traditional and modern genres of performance (from *wayang* to *dangdut*) were deployed to attract the masses, as in previous elections. The images of national pop musicians (Dewa and Slank) as well as internationally famous figures (Barack Obama, David Beckham, Osama bin Laden and Superman) were hijacked and superimposed onto campaign posters. What struck me most was the use of cheerleaders in Bengkulu and fashion shows in two other cities for election campaigning. In one such fashion show held in Temanggung,

sponsored by the local electoral commission, young girls walked and posed in their glittering sexy dresses in imitation of the adult contest participants and professional models on television. In Medan, candidate Himatul Fadillah (Golkar) sponsored another fashion show on 15 March 2009 featuring 50 older Muslim women (all above 45 years old, and one 70 years old) modelling their Muslim dresses. One encounters great difficulty in finding any internal connections between the election campaign goals and these shows. The medium was the message. Entertainment reigned unequivocally over the entire campaign period.

Of all the entertainment formats derived from television programs, 'Indonesian Idol' was obviously the most readily appealing to campaigners in the 2009 elections. The program was highly popular on television because of its "emphasis on the 'democratic' voting system via SMS to 'elect' the *Idola*" (Coutas 2008: 113). Not to be outdone by television imitating politics, candidates in the 2009 elections were moved to imitate the television hit program. Apparently, it was precisely this show that gave many of the candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds the inspiration and the requisite hope to run for the elections in the first place. Regardless of the ideologies, platforms, or even the empty rhetorical styles of the parties they represented, it was the ideology of 'Indonesian Idol' that dictated the course of events. This is an ideology—already nationally and internationally upheld—that persuaded people from all walks of life to believe in both the possibility and the desirability for anyone at all to venture out upon their own rags-to-riches story. This ideology spread widely along with the 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) sentiment that also spread in the same decade, spearheaded especially by the first generation of indie musicians and independent film makers (Baulch 2007; van Heeren 2002, 2012; Wallach 2008).

Unfortunately, individualization, DIY and feminization that marked the 2009 elections had some tragic consequences that came in rather unexpected forms. As the macho motorcycle convoys and associated violence receded into the past, the increased competition among the swelling number of candidates inevitably led to a new phenomenon. Not only were the masses split and dispersed, but there were waves of massive distress among the many people who did not win seats in the elections. The mass media reported psychiatric wards being overwhelmed with former candidates, who were experiencing mental disorders following their defeat in the polls. Employees in one hospital in the city of Solo had to work double shifts with the arrival of 200 patients in this category in a single day (Bayuni 2009). Elsewhere, a significant number of failed

candidates decided to commit suicide. According to one study, women were overrepresented in these cases (Buehler 2009b). As in their favorite show 'Indonesian Idol', it appears that many contestants had been lured by false promises of extraordinary success and paid a high price when reality finally hit home.

Concluding Note

In this chapter, I have shown how, during the series of sham elections under the New Order government, the masses behaved in ways that might at first appear vulgar and unruly. But considered within the specific political context of that time, their behavior can be regarded as much more rational and subversively powerful than has usually been portrayed, more so indeed than the political activism of the urban intelligentsia. In 2009, however, the political setting had altered significantly; so had the country's electoral laws and procedures. The subversive power of the masses dissipated, ironically at a moment when Indonesia's democracy had become more liberalized.

This new development should not be taken as an anomaly. Benedict Anderson reminds us that "under normal circumstances, the logic of electoralism is in the direction of domestication" (1996: 14). As Indonesian politics becomes increasingly "normalised" (Aspinall 2005) it is only to be expected that the great majority of the people would be further "domesticated". How the process of domestication via elections unfolds varies across different sociohistorical settings. In no way does this chapter suggest that the Indonesian case constitutes something uniquely or essentially Indonesian. Rather, this chapter has identified and analyzed three specifically historical factors that appear to have significantly contributed to the serious fragmentation of the masses: the new electoral laws in 2009 that allowed aspiring candidates to compete as individuals on the basis of majority votes; the engulfing effects of the new media, particularly though not exclusively the televised entertainment industry; and the broader context of orality-oriented modes of interaction in this society.

Myths and irrationality are commonly found in all elections (*see*, e.g., Chua 2007; Heryanto 2006a: 149–53; Taylor 1996b). Yet, these costly political rituals are held across the globe as a prerequisite for the almost universal commitment to a modern utopia called 'democracy'. Too many of us imagine democracy to be something real; and we zealously promote it as universally desirable (Heryanto 2009b; Heryanto and Mandal 2003; Lev 2005). This obsession with ideal types of democracy

has often led to misunderstandings of the behavior of the masses in both democratic and authoritarian regimes.

In 1992, in an attempt to contain the reckless masses that had taken over its 'festival of democracy', the New Order proposed that all campaign activities be moved to the state-controlled mass media. Neither the masculinist and repressive New Order government nor its more democratic successor governments had the capacity to domesticate the powerful masses, which they initially intended to mobilize for their own purposes. In 2009, however, the soft power of the media industry came to their assistance. Gaining the momentum precipitated by the new electoral laws in 2009, the media industry extended its entertainment ideology and commercial empire into street politics and into the elections. Ultimately, these media companies had the last laugh. In 2014, Indonesia will be holding another election. One can be sure the powerful screen culture that will reign in the streets will be reported back to the millions of screens of television sets, Ipads and smartphones of Indonesian citizens.

Indonesia's lower classes are the focus of this chapter but not of this book as a whole, which takes a closer look at the dynamics of the urban middle classes for reasons provided in Chapter 1. It would be seriously remiss to analyze the urban middle classes in isolation from the lower classes. In all the chapters, I have tried to show how these various segments of Indonesia's population (who can be identified and who self-identify along class, gender, religious, or ideological lines) partake in the complex (sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting) endeavors to redefine their collective identities in the first decade of the twenty-first century. It is a remarkably exciting and volatile period, with seductive promises of new opportunities but also risks and apprehension. This is a post-New Order-authoritarian period, marked by an unprecedented rise in the public profile of Islamic politics, public debates on past human rights violation, protracted and irrevocable divisions within the top political elite, the rise of Asia's economic power, and a digital communication revolution around the world.

Much of the ideological battle for hegemonic position to fill the power vacuum created by the fall of the New Order government has taken place on prominent popular culture platforms in various forms. While the book focuses on contemporary cultural politics in Indonesia, each chapter provides a broader historical perspective. An in-depth analysis of identity and political contestation within the nation is the focus of the book, but transnational engagements and global dimensions

are consistently significant parts of the story in each chapter. A central message running through all the chapters is that Indonesia has a rich diversity of peoples, histories and cultures. This wealth is the blessing result of a mix of visions, creative works by cosmopolitan-minded people pursuing a local version of hybrid modernity. Unfortunately, soon after the nation's independence, much of this extraordinary cultural wealth has been denied, distorted or forgotten in the official history and public memory, as competing groups of modernists try to impose a much narrower definition of what it means to be a legitimate and respectable Indonesian.

This study addresses two major and complementary areas. The first refers to issues that were most visible and intensely debated in the national public arena and concerns the politics of identity and pleasure, including popular culture with strongly Islamic themes (Chapters 2 and 3); as well as the popularity of screen culture from Northeast Asia, particularly South Korea (Chapter 7). The second major area of enquiry pertains to the more depressing issues that have been largely evaded, censured, forgotten, or misunderstood in the general public. These include questions of the 1965–66 massacres that have haunted the nation ever since (Chapters 4 and 5); the century long discrimination against the ethnic Chinese (Chapter 6), and the lower classes (Chapter 8). The underside of the politics of identity and pleasure are plight, predicament and pain.

This book is intended to be a modest contribution to the recent and growing efforts among analysts to give due recognition to the wealth of Indonesian political cultures and histories. I am conscious of the complexity of the subject, as well as of my own limitations, and what a book can cover. This book is intended to be neither encyclopedic in its coverage nor comprehensive in its investigation. Operating primarily as an ethnographic study, with an emphasis on in depth qualitative data, this project cannot make any claims for representation of the issues under examination, or any generalization of the arguments proposed. Notwithstanding such limitations, I hope that this attempt offers an informed contribution to growing scholarship on the study of Indonesian cultural politics, and the politics of everyday life, both in the past and present.

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Al Kautsar (Indonesia 1977, Chaerul Umam)
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Bukan Sekedar Kenangan (Indonesia 1998, Jonggi Sihombing)
Bunga-tembok (Indonesia 2003, Yayan Wiludiharto)
Ca-bau-kan (Indonesia 2002, Nia Dinata)
Catatan Harian Si Boy (Indonesia 2011, Putrama Tuta)
Catatan Si Boy (Indonesia 1987, Nasri Cheppy)
Dalam Mihrab Cinta (Indonesia 2010, Habiburrahman El Shirazy)
Darah dan Doa (Indonesia 1950, Usmar Ismail)
Darah Garuda-Merah Putih II (Indonesia 2010, Conor Allyn and Yadi Sugandi)
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Gie (Indonesia 2005, Riri Riza)
Hasduk Berpola (Indonesia 2013, Harris Nizam)
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Janur Kuning (Indonesia 1979, Alam Surawidjaja)
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The opening of KONFIDEN Short Film Festival (19–22 November 2009), at The Ismail Marzuki Jakarta Arts Center, hosted by the Community of Independent Films (Komunitas Film Independen or KONFIDEN). The huge map shows the many community-based filmmaking activities across the archipelagic nation (*see* Chapter 4). Photo by Ariel Heryanto.

As in many parts of Asia, in Indonesia many people (including foreign visitors and residents there) enjoy easy, quick and affordable access to old and especially newest international films in pirated DVD version, for less than USD 1 a title. Photo by Ariel Heryanto.

C2

Islamic Fashion Festival IX (29–30 June 2010) at the 5-star Dharmawangsa Jakarta Hotel, attended by approximately 500 people. Muslim clothes for women are estimated to take 20 per cent share of the total garment production in Indonesia, and local designers aspire to make Indonesia the Mecca of Muslim fashion (*see* Chapters 2 and 3). Photo by Endro Gunawan.

A model displaying one work by prominent designer Merry Pramono during the Islamic Fashion Festival IX (30 June 2010). Photo by Endro Gunawan.

The iconic scene from the documentary film *The Act of Killing* (Denmark 2012) directed by Joshua Oppenheimer (*see* Chapter 5). There is no particular reasons for the appearance of this colorful fish-shaped building in this film, rich with surrealist twists. The defunct building used to be a seafood restaurant. Members of the production team found it by accident and decided to refurbish and use it as a set. Photo courtesy of Anonymous co-director.

Anwar Congo, one of the leading characters in *The Act of Killing*, took an active role not only in acting but also in planning and producing the film, or a "ruse" (as the director calls it) within *The Act of Killing*. Photo courtesy of Anonymous co-director.

Sang Penari (The Dancer) (2011, Isfansyah) won four awards at the 2011 Indonesian Film Festival, for Best Film, Best Director, Best Leading Actress, and Best Supporting Actress (*see* Chapter 4). Photo by Ariel Heryanto.

Cover dance by K-pop fans has been a widespread practice among urban youth in Indonesia, as in many parts of Southeast Asia. It was included as part of the entertainment shows during the 2011 Indonesian Film Festival in Jakarta (10 December 2011). Photo by Ariel Heryanto.

Cover dance, a contribution to the 2010 Gathering K-pop Indonesian-Korean Community (6 June 2010) in the South Court of the National Monument complex, Central Jakarta. Appearing in the background is the base of the National monument, and farther behind it is the top of Masjid Istiqlal, Southeast Asia's largest mosque. Photo by Herzon Michael.

Muslim women make up a large proportion of the Indonesia-based fans of K-pop (*see* Chapter 7). Yes We Care is one of the sponsors of the 2010 Gathering K-pop Indonesian-Korean Community. Yes We Care is the name of a Facebook-based fan group of Super Junior (the most popular K-pop boy band in Indonesia). Photo by Herzon Michael.

Fans for Big Bang, another K-pop boy band that has great popularity in Indonesia, at the 2010 Gathering K-pop Indonesian-Korean Community. Photo by Herzon Michael.

Members of Yes We Care jostling to write their well wishes and signatures for Kangin (member of Super Junior), who was about to be discharged of conscription in a month's time (July 2010). Photo by Herzon Michael.

Multi-layered identities. A young Indonesian Muslim woman and a staunch fan of K-pop. "Eunhae" stands for Eunhyuk and Donghae, two members of Super Junior who made a sub-group of their own. Photo by Herzon Michael.

Claimed by the performers to be Indonesia's first K-pop flash mob, this cover dance of Super Junior's hit "Sorry, Sorry" (2009) took place in a shopping mall in Malang (East Java) on 16 December 2009. Photo by M. Fadli Rozi.

Multiple identities in the "Hanbok Studio" during the big event "Hallyu Explosion 2010" (14 November 2010) in Malang (*see* Chapter 7). Photo by Ariel Heryanto.

Piety and pleasure attract. During the "Hallyu Explosion 2010", fans took turns to express their affections and immortalized on their mobile phones. Photo by Ariel Heryanto.

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture critically examines what media and screen culture reveal about the ways urban-based Indonesians attempted to redefine their identity in the first decade of this century. Through a richly nuanced analysis of expressions and representations found in screen culture (cinema, television and social media), it analyses the waves of energy and optimism, and the disillusionment, disorientation and despair, that arose in the power vacuum that followed the dramatic collapse of the militaristic New Order government.

While in-depth analyses of identity and political contestation within the nation are the focus of the book, trans-national engagements and global dimensions are a significant part of the story in each chapter. The author focuses on contemporary cultural politics in Indonesia, but each chapter contextualizes current circumstances by setting them within a broader historical perspective.

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